

**A NARRATIVE APPROACH TO PASTORAL CARE FOR THE  
ELDERLY FACED WITH THE OPTION OF SUICIDE IN  
SOUTH KOREA**

**By**

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## ABSTRACT

This study is an attempt to analyse and understand elderly suicide within the context of pastoral counselling in the current Korean society. This research on elderly suicide is carried out from the perspective of postfoundationalist practical theology, using a narrative method as a methodological approach. For this purpose, Korean novels that deal with elderly suicide were analysed and in-depth interviews with four co-researchers who have attempted suicide or have any family members who committed suicide were conducted. This research was conducted on a social constructionist basis. The power of modern discourses were analyzed using the narratives of the four co-researchers' experiences. The aim of this analysis is to figure out the ways in which the dominant discourse of South Korean society constructs the lives of the co-researchers. The harmful influences of these discourses have been deconstructed through the interviews. In order to better understand the narratives of the co-researchers, an interdisciplinary team approach to this research was employed. As informed by the various interpretations and new understandings that all four team members provided, I am impressed by the power of the narrative approach. This study demonstrates that elderly suicide is not a trivial problem but a very serious problem in South Korea. The contribution of this study is to show that elderly people are able to re-author their own lives, as opposed to the social common belief that they are obstinate and unchangeable. I would never have reached this conclusion without listening to the narratives of the co-researchers.

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## LIST OF KEY WORDS

1. Narrative
2. Postfoundational
3. Practical Theology
4. Social construction
5. South Korea
6. Elderly
7. Suicidal Option
8. Confucian Authoritarianism
9. Interdisciplinary Conversation
10. Elderly Suicide Novels

## **1. Research Orientation**

### **1.1 Introduction**

In the spring of 2014, a mother in her mid-sixties and her two daughters, who were living in desperate poverty, committed familial joint suicide (Chosun, Mar 1, 2014). I was troubled by the news report and I went to church to pray. I was especially disturbed by the fact that some people who are too poor and sick to live on their own means are driven to commit familial joint suicide, while many other people were enjoying shopping for the new semester or going on spring outings. Confronted with the tragic news, I knelt down before God.

Suicide permeates our society. Suicide is committed by young students, entertainers, university presidents, mayors, governors, and an ex-president. The fact that more and more people commit suicide leads me to suspect that Korean society does not function properly as a social organism any longer. Clearly our society is malfunctioning, since Korea has the highest suicide rates among OECD (Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development) countries.

I cried and prayed to God, asking why there were so many Koreans who commit suicide, despite the fact that Korea was not only an economically strong nation but also a recognised democratic country, probably envied by other countries. I also asked God how the love of God could be transmitted to our neighbours so that our society might become a well-functioning social organism and how people could live until they died a natural death, instead of giving up their lives.

In particular, elderly suicide has recently become a serious social problem in Korea. It may be noted that the suicide rate of older people is increasing faster than that of younger people. Approximately 4,300 people of 60 plus years commit suicide every year. The suicide death rate is also higher among older people. According to the death rate of suicides per 100,000 population, the suicide death rate among those aged 80 years and older was 112.9 in 2008, which was more than five times that among those in their

twenties, i.e., 22.6(Statistics Korea, 2009). Elderly suicide does not simply make news any longer but becomes an everyday occurrence. Many old people are at present attempting to kill themselves and some of them will end up dying. This phenomenon is tragic in consideration of the fact that every birth and life is special in the sense that only one of five hundred million sperm cells ultimately penetrates the egg.

### **1.1.1 My Story**

My interest in suicide was engendered by my childhood experiences. A close friend of mine, who was my classmate, committed suicide at the age of fifteen. He and I used to walk 10 miles back and forth to school every day. We talked about school, family, friends, and so on, playing and laughing on a dirt road. One summer day, I had to walk alone to school. As I approached his small house at the foot of a mountain, I could hear his mother crying and mourning, “Where are you, Myung-Ho! Alas. Alas. Myung-Ho, my son!” She was wiping her eyes with her sleeves and holding the casket in her hands. Her neighbour said to her, “Myung-Ho’s mother, stop crying and calm down. Since he is dead, he is no more your son. You have cried enough over a dead son. Stop crying and pull yourself together.” Myung-Ho’s mother managed to stand up and say in a choked voice, “I would not be so embittered if my son had enjoyed decent meals. He was breast-fed poorly. He has been hungry ever since.” She was overwhelmed with heartache so she could not speak any longer. Later I came to know that he had hanged himself from a pine tree. I could not never forget or recover from the shock I experienced at that time. Until I graduated from high school, I had often heard the news that someone’s father killed himself by drinking pesticide. Some friends of mine lost their fathers, who were so stressed from hard farm work, family problems, debt, or gambling that they drank pesticide in a fit of anger. Such suicide incidents occurred a couple of times a year. I could not understand why they drank pesticide so easily, no matter how difficult life may have become. There were many widows living in my area. I was wondered why so many middle-aged men committed suicide. But I could not ask anyone, for everybody kept silent for the time being and a sombre atmosphere hovered above the village after a suicide.

After I left my hometown to work in Seoul, it seemed that suicide became no longer a

matter of concern for me. Then, in the summer of 1998, a deacon who went to church with me went up a little mountain close to his home and committed suicide by pouring gasoline over his body and setting himself on fire. I still cannot forget the sound his wife made as she mourned over his death. I could not identify his face at the hospital, because his head was bandaged, his eyes and mouth were open, and his face was severely distorted. He was such a good person who was working diligently serving the church. It was a mystery to me that he set himself on fire on a mountain in broad daylight.

A few years ago, I became especially interested in suicide amongst the elderly because of the following two incidents. First, I happened to meet an old person who had attempted suicide but had survived the attempt. I started a church in 2011 and ministered in the church until 2013. During that time, I often visited nursing homes and sanatori in order to evangelise old people. I met an old man, whom I still cannot forget, at a sanatorium. He had survived a suicide attempt. As I looked at him, I used to wonder how far he was away from his childhood dream and what he was thinking about. He refused to be taken care of or eat anything. He was just blinking his eyes.

Second, there was news about family related suicides in 2013 and 2014. There was a family suicide, which was an unknown type of suicide at that time. In Seoul in August 2013, a man in his eighties killed his wife, who had been suffering from dementia for three years, by taping her mouth, and killed himself by taking an overdose of sleeping pills. In Chungsong, Kyungbuk, in May 2013, a man in his eighties, who had been taking care of his wife who had been suffering from dementia for four years, committed double suicide by driving a car into a reservoir. In Seoul in January 2014, a certain Mr. Park, who was living alone supporting his parents after divorcing his wife in 1998, committed familial joint suicide after complaining about his difficult life; he was sixty years old, and his father and mother, who were eighty six and eighty years old, respectively, were suffering from dementia; still worse, he was almost bankrupt (Chosun, Jan 8, 2014, A11). In March 2014, a mother and her two daughters committed suicide by burning charcoal in a closed room. They left six hundred dollars for the rental and bills (Chosen, March 1, 2014, A10). In order to understand this unique phenomenon, daily newspapers attempted to analyse suicide in terms of culture.

Elderly suicide in Korea is not simply an individual matter but a social issue. This may well be related to the fact that the Korean society is becoming an ageing society at a fast pace. As the population is rapidly ageing, there appears such problems as generation conflicts, economic problems due to early retirement and, loneliness, some of, which leads to an extreme choice as elderly suicide (Park, Sun-Ae, Huh, Joon-Soo, 2013, 78-108). According to the National Board of Health and Welfare (2014), elderly suicide has quickly increased from 2010 to 2013. In 2014, approximately two and a half times (146 people) as many people as in 2010 (59 people) committed suicide. The suicide rate of older people is higher than that of any other age group (Sorenson, 1991). In 2010, the number of suicides among those aged sixty years and older was 5,391, which was the highest among the OECD countries. The suicide rate (the number of suicides per 100,000 population) is higher for older people: 52.7 for those in their sixties, 83.5 for those in their seventies, and 123.3 for those in their eighties and beyond (Statistics Korea, 2011).

I was born in 1956 and belong to the elderly in an ageing Korean society. The Korean population structure is changing from a former pyramid to a pot shape, which will be changed into a mushroom shape sooner or later.

Demographers predict that problems of ageing will be a time bomb in Korea. In this society, I cannot be exempt from the problems of ageing such as enervation, depression, frustration and, death: I often ask myself how I am supposed to deal with dignity with such problems as I grow older.

As a pastor, I have been primarily concerned with the ways in which I could evangelise old people by helping them to have knowledge of ageing, have hope of the kingdom of heaven, and to construct a sound identity in their lives. Nowadays, however, I am concerned with the way in which I can better understand the lives of the elderly. In other words, I am asking a practical question which foregrounds the importance of realising one's life and finding its meaning before death. I hope to be able to put the findings from interpersonal communications with older people into practice in both church and society. The goal of the present study is to perform pastoral care by asking questions about the limitation and foundation of our common existence (Kurt Lückel, 1994:113).



It is desperately urgent not only to understand but also to prepare for occurrences of elderly suicide. In this research project, the research will conduct an analytical research on the stories of those old people who have felt a suicidal urge, with a view to providing them with pastoral counselling through narrative therapies. This research approaches practical theology as an encounter between van Huyssteen's philosophy of postfoundationalism and the narrative approach.

### **1.1.2 The Need for the Research**

Elderly suicide is no longer an individual problem but a social issue. In particular, elderly suicide has become a serious social issue that cannot be underestimated because it incurs great cost, such as loss of life, bodily injuries, medical expenses, sorrow and pain, destruction of families and local communities (Marschean, 2002). In order to prevent increasing elderly suicide, the Ministry of Health and Welfare organised the Headquarters for National Life Respect Movement in March, 2004, launched a private organisation for suicide prevention in April, 2004, and published the media report guide for suicide, recommended by experts on suicide prevention in July, 2004. The city administration of Seoul promoted programmes for suicide prevention as a way of making Seoul a safe city in 2005. Although private and public joint corporations made many attempts that led to abundant research on health and medical treatment processes, elderly suicide is still on the increase. Institutional strategies for the solving of the social problem of elderly suicide are faced with limitations.

The problem of elderly suicide requires a qualitative research from four different perspectives. First, the fundamental reason why I want to do research on elderly suicide is because I am getting older. I am afraid of getting old, because I feel as if I am entering a new world to which I have never been. Until now, I have been on a rising curve. And yet, a falling curve is in store for me, since I will have to retire and become physically weaker in the near future. Whenever I hear old people saying that they want to go to heaven as soon as possible, I cannot but wonder how it feels to be an old person. Thus I want to investigate the ways in which old people around me live their lives. What is the most serious problem faced by old people? What kinds of wounds do old people have? How do those wounds effect those around old people? In exploring these questions, I

would like to know what it feels like to become an old person.

The second reason I am interested in elderly suicide is because I cannot easily understand why old people commit suicide despite their experience and wisdom. In consideration of the fact that old people have managed to overcome much suffering and great pain, I wonder what kind of difficult situations compel them to kill themselves. Generally speaking, when a young person commits suicide, people tend to feel sympathy with him or her and want to know the exact motive or reason for suicide. In contrast, people pay little attention to elderly suicide. It seems that people think little of elderly suicide. In my opinion, however, elderly suicide is a more important social issue than suicide among the young. Young people tend to commit suicide adventitiously or impulsively, when they cannot overcome their problems. But old people commit suicide for diverse and convoluted reasons. If an experienced and wise old person commits suicide, presumably he or she does so upon mature consideration. Under what desperate situations, can an elderly person commit suicide? I think it is self-contradictory for a society to ignore elderly suicide, which deserves more attention.

Third, elderly suicide becomes an important social problem as people come to live longer due to medical advances and the number of old people becomes more than that of young people. While the number of old people is on the increase and life expectancy becomes larger, old people are marginalised in society and ignored by their children. Old people, who used to enjoy authority as head of the traditional patriarchal family, have handed their authority over to their children (Roh, 2007:37). Young people do not want to support their parents any more. Although young people have a different understanding of filial duty than old people, old people still argue for a traditional authoritarian position and role, while young people who have social power call them “old men in the backroom” (Roh, 2007:135). As a result, conflict occurs between husband and wife, between parents and children, and between friends. In addition, elderly divorce becomes popular because of conflict between husband and wife. If we fail to reorganise our senescent years, we may cause trouble not only for ourselves but also for those around us because of our own wounds. Those wounds may well lead an old person to commit suicide. Hence, compiling research on elderly suicide will help old people to construct a sound identity and in so doing enable them to live a happy existence for the rest of their lives.

Last but not least, it is noteworthy that some church elders, who allegedly enjoyed a good reputation in society, have recently committed suicide. Why did old Christians commit suicide just like nonbelievers? The church teaches that suicide is a sin. Theologically, suicide is not a viable alternative. Suicide is not pleasing to God. Most Christians know that God dwells within them and God walks with them. Is it difficult for a Christian to overcome a suicidal urge through faith, when she feels a suicidal urge over and over again? As a pastor, I believe that it is the responsibility of the church to help Christians who feel a suicidal urge.

For these reasons, I believe that research on elderly suicide is urgently required. We need to listen to individuals who have experienced suicide-related difficulties in order to be able to find, prevent, or cure potential suicides. Insofar as suicide is a secret individual act, a quantitative research on elderly suicide has limitations for approaching the underlying motives for actions taken under diverse circumstances. We need to take into account a variety of underlying, intrinsic factors including in-depth knowledge of the individual, because suicide is a complex incident that is an outcome of conscious or unconscious decisions in the face of individual situations (Norman, 1980). The problem of elderly suicide cannot be properly solved by simply understanding the reality or considering the current state of affairs. Instead, it requires a holistic perspective which considers those interrelated factors that affect the mentality of the elderly, such as the changing social milieu and family forms and, alienation within the family for example.

In order to better understand elderly suicide, we should be able to look at the way in which an old person as a whole person experiences and overcomes difficulties from his or her own perspective. For this purpose, narrative approaches are a useful and insightful method. And yet, research on suicide, domestic or foreign, is primarily carried out in terms of a phenomenological grounded theory methodology. As a result, the focus is on the meanings of individual experiences, which may vary according to individual factors. In contrast, narrative approaches reflect not only on personal perspectives but also on larger cultural factors that have an effect on those individual viewpoints (Kaufman, 1986:77). Therefore, a study on elderly suicide needs a narrative approach. A phenomenological study, grounded theory methodology, or focus group study can only reveal the meanings of suicidal urges on the part of research participants, while failing to

reflect on the way in which they recognise their own experiences. However, narratives can help to overcome this limitation of a quantitative study inasmuch as they reveal one's identity, whether it is one's own or not (Michael Bamberg, 2005:223).

### **1.1.3 The Purpose of the Research**

The aim of this study is to explore elderly suicide using the narrative approach in analysing the stories of elderly people, who underwent the sixty-year historical turmoil which included Japanese colonialism, the Korean War, industrialisation and military dictatorships. I will do narrative research by applying a narrative approach to a qualitative research. It must be noted that narrative research is different from narrative therapy. Narrative research is a process for finding what is happening and what other possibilities there are, without any manipulative intent. In comparison, narrative therapy uses an alternative discourse from the beginning in order to solve the problems of the client. Hence, narrative research is the result of applying a narrative approach to qualitative research, and narrative therapy is the result of applying a narrative approach to psychological therapy.

The narrative approach emphasises the importance of listening to the unique story of each individual (Rockquemore & Laszloffy, 2003). The narrative approach was first introduced by the Australian scholar Michael White, and David Epston of New Zealand. They believed that meaning is constructed by the story of life which we tell and listen to. The narrative approach plays an important role in helping to understand and communicate with people by means of stories. The power of story is derived from its openness. A story expands the horizon of meaning on the part of a co-researcher *ad infinitum* and thereby enables him or her to elicit various interpretations and understandings. Thus the goal of this study does not lie in finding one's own self but in revealing the ways in which language discloses or distorts one; this study aims not so much to think about stories as to think with stories (Frank, 1995).

The narrative approach foregrounds three considerations. First, not only do people tell a story but they also think, act, and interpret on the basis of stories. Second, a story of life is composed of both social, structural realms and stories which are told by people. Third,

life as a story is composed of four interrelated dimensions: structure, socio-cultural dimension, interpersonal dimension, and personal dimension (Kenyon, Jan-Eric Ruth, and Wilhem Mader, 1999). The narrative approach will enable a co-researcher to reconstruct his or her own life, and in so doing reflect on the suicide and death of the elderly and ultimately look at them from a new perspective and give new meaning to them. Therefore, the present study aims to conduct research on the perspectives of elderly people on suicide through the life stories of the elderly co-researchers, with a view to understanding social discourses embedded in the situations, difficulties, and suicidal urges that older people experience. Moreover, this study intends to help old people to construct their own life story that can be integrated into a closing account of life, by using discourses concerning life situations and attitudes, the influence of suicidal urges, and suicide prevention in terms of discourse deconstruction. In other words, the process of integrating the past life means experiencing a peaceful life in thinking of unsolved situations in a synthetic way and making sense of the results and meanings of one's own life. Therefore, I will conduct research on the stories of elderly people who have experienced the urge of committing suicide in order to help those in need of psychological care through a pastoral counselling based on the narrative approach.

The purpose of this study is to help elderly people to deal with the issue of suicide from the perspective of pastoral care. Korean churches should be taking seriously the fact that there are so many old people whom they can care for in one way or another. Death or suicide is a serious problem facing old people in Korean society. However, pastoral counsellors have avoided the issue of suicide because the Korean church has condemned suicide, which ends one's life given by God. Roh Won-Seok argues that our society cannot evade discussing elderly suicide any more (2016:208). The researcher also believes that we cannot avoid the issue of suicide anymore because death is an existential problem. Insofar as pastoral care is both spiritual and ministerial, it should handle spiritual, psychological, and physical difficulties relating to elderly suicide. Typical questions to ask include: "How do elderly people view suicide?" "How are the lives of elderly people affected by their views of suicide?" "How do these changes in their lives

in turn affect their relationships with God?" In consideration of these questions, the researcher will attempt to bring suicide into public discourse. It is hoped that this study will help pastors to take suicide seriously instead of simply condemning it and enable them to take good care of the spiritual needs of elderly people in their relationships with God. It is also hoped that this study will make a contribution to the ministries of pastoral care in the Korean church by suggesting a new perspective on suicide.

#### **1.1.4 Research Design**

A research design is a detailed planning of how the research will be carried out following a procedure. The design of narrative research or qualitative research does not follow an order. The reason is that narrative research is carried out through a recurring system. However, it is necessary that the researcher should construct a research design in the beginning.

In order to study the research motives, researchers must decide on the topic of the research, the people who will participate in the research, and the place. They should also systemise feasible questions and design the accuracy, compactness, and reliability of information and data analysis in the responsive interviewing model. If research questions turn out to be inappropriate during the interview, it is possible to reformulate the questions. Through a detailed and thick description, the researcher will reflect on himself with great flexibility and use his worldview, values, and angles (Merriam, 1988). Stories are a structure of self-interpretation that is formed through the relationship between the inner ego and the outer world (Rollo R. May, 1991: 20). Thus narratives transform our lives into stories and interprets them (Ko, 1995:39-40). This research will be conducted in a semi-structure. The researchers will carry out this research design in three stages: construction, deconstruction, and reconstruction.

##### *Construction*

The first stage of narrative research can be comprised of "building a relationship with the co-researchers," "creating distance from the co-researchers," and "leading the co-researchers' stories." In order to lead the stories, it is necessary to build a stable

relationship with the co-researchers. In order to avoid getting flooded, it is important to keep a distance from the co-researchers. In order to keep the stories on the track of an interpretable narrative, it is necessary to lead the stories.

"Leading the co-researchers' stories" can be seen as a method of structuring the co-researchers' stories (D. Capps, 1998:23-52). Structuring the co-researchers' stories is not just summarising but also interpreting the co-researchers' stories. Interpreting a narrative changes an "unclear world" into a "clear world" and an "immature story" into a "mature story." Through this process, the co-researcher can naturally justify his or her problem and understand and interpret it.

In the narrative research, construction appears inside a community, and therefore authority, knowledge, and truth become problems in the cultural narrative of the society. According to Mair(1988:127) "We inhabit the great stories of our culture". White (1991) states that these cultural narratives decide how a personal life narrative is formed. Furthermore cultural narratives not only affect us and give special meaning to current events in our lives but also erases the meanings of other events (Freedman & Combs 1996: 32-33). Therefore culturally dominant voices reign over a person and creates experiential texts and weaken narratives (Leder, 1990:11).

Weak narratives are formed by culturally dominant voices or by other people. One's actions are then understood through these weak narratives. Weak narratives produce weak conclusions and have many negative effects. Weak conclusions increase the narrative of problems and this narrative grows more powerful and affects the future events greatly. Weak narratives often conceal one's skill, knowledge, ability, and endowment with the narrative of problems.

The researcher will create a variety of experiential texts through an in-depth interview with the co-researcher by using different methods to clarify, summarise, and question his or her narrative (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000:4). The experiential text is not simply found but created through the conversation between the researcher and the co-researcher (White, 1997:130-132). The researcher provides an opportunity for the co-researchers to speak about their own values, meanings, and experiences in terms of time (past, present

and future), space (location and place), and culture (context, interaction between internal and external condition). This is an opportunity for the co-researchers to explore their own experiences narratively. The researcher and the co-researcher journey through this process together discovering the suppressed narrative and create clear narratives that show the core of the problem. In so doing, they will "question the root and limitation of our existence" (Kurt Lückel, 1994:113). Then the researcher tries to form alternative stories with new meanings through the process of deconstruction.

### *Deconstruction*

The pulling apart and examining of 'taken-for-granted' truths is known as deconstruction (Alice Morgan, 2000:46). Deconstruction in narrative research refers to creating new meaning by pulling apart the imperfections and holes in the stories of a problem that people bring.

In order to perform deconstruction with the co-researcher, the researcher repeatedly asks him or her to tell and retell and use several methods to create rich experiential texts. First, the researcher will read novels that deal with elderly suicide. Novels are a suitable medium in that they show the lives and experiences of old people, who have experienced the war, poverty, and despair, and who have been sacrificed for the economic growth of the country. The researcher explored the stories of old people in nineteen novels that deal with elderly suicide. Then the researcher read newspaper accounts of elderly suicide and suicide notes with the co-researchers.

The researcher will engage with not only the interviews with the co-researchers but also newspaper accounts, suicide notes, and novels dealing with elderly suicide as a tool for the narrative research. Some reasons for employing such unconventional methods as novels are as follows.

First, Leavy (2009:48) mentions that "it is now widely accepted in academia that there are 'truths' to be found in fiction, and nonfiction also draws on aspects of fiction in its rendering of social reality"



Second, according to Frank (2000:482), “factual representation obscures possible alternative interpretations.” In short, Leavy summarises that, “traditional representational forms that typically result in an account or finite set of conclusions may render invisible those interpretations not put forth by the researcher, creating the false appearance of a ‘truth’ that has been ‘discovered.’ Fiction can, ironically, expose that which ‘factual representation’ conceals by its very implications.” (43)

Third, fiction can portray, “a complexity of lived experience” that elucidates even “the complexity of power relations and human interactions.” (Frank, 483) Fiction can access and express, “the texture of human experience, partly informed by the complex relationship between the structural contexts in which we operate and our own agency.” (Leavy, 46)

The researcher tried to find problems inscribed within the co-researcher’s personal life through an in-depth interview. The researcher paid attention to the co-researcher’s relationships with other people and with God, to deconstruct their effects on his or her life through the process of discourse. Deconstruction consists of verbally exposing suppressed problems that have secretly seeped into one’s life; in so doing, he or she will be liberated from the stories (White, 1991:29). Once the person refuses to be tied down and affected by these problems, the problems have no more control of him or her. When the persons realises how much the problems have been suppressing them, they will disconnect themselves from the harmful relationship together with the problems. Eventually, the co-researcher stopped relying on the stories about the problem and started creating a foundation for a new story or an alternative story that enabled him or her to take new action.

### *Reconstruction*

As mentioned above, stories of problems can be renewed into new stories through the process of deconstructing past stories. The next step is reconstruction, which includes not only spotlighting the problems in life but also experiencing life differently and creating new meanings. This process revolves around escaping the dominant stories of life, finding stories irrelevant to the problems, and then continually reconstructing new stories

(White, 1995:13). In the end, the researcher will converse with the co-researcher in order to discover unique new outcomes. The researcher co-authors a new story with the co-researcher, in the sense that he or she makes use of those findings to end the dominant stories. The researcher gives meaning to unique outcomes alongside of the co-researcher and connects it with past events, enriching, strengthening, and thickening the alternative story.

By absorbing the world of thickened narratives in the process of deconstruction and reconstruction, the co-researcher is able to change mentally, emotionally, and behaviourally. The new universe that is offered in deconstruction is different from the real universe. Co-researchers will realise that they are part of this new universe in a new way. Moreover, the new universe requires the co-researcher to act differently. By adopting a new perspective and behaving differently, the co-researcher is able to author alternative narratives on the basis of new experiences.

In this process of re-authoring, re-telling is a necessary part of creating new stories. The conversations, questions, and discussions between the researcher and the co-researcher work as part of re-telling, leading to rich descriptions. During this process, the researcher must filter and find information that is relevant to the subject of the research. This is carried out in two steps. First, it must be accepted that there are epistemological varieties in the stories we make in postmodern society. In order to overcome these differences, the researcher carried out interdisciplinary conversations. Interdisciplinary conversation is a part of re-authoring conversation and requires "transversal rationality" to enrich the description of the co-researcher's life and identity. Van Huyssteen (2009:20) states that through the interdisciplinary interaction of different points of view, it is possible to increase the flexibility of human reason and perception. Therefore, the researcher tried to create new meanings from the co-researchers' stories using transversal rationality. I asked four professors in different disciplines to reflect on my co-researchers' interviews and my reflection on them. I analysed their stories in terms of my methodology in the hope of being able to obtain an in-depth understanding of elderly suicide from their perspectives. My interdisciplinary team made a great contribution to the present study in this regard.

Second, I reflected on the co-researchers' stories and the stories from the interdisciplinary team. Basically, this research is based on the personal experiences of the co-researchers. Their stories deal with religious experiences and the ways in which they are effected by them. Their community and their world are also part of their stories. I was able to better understand the lives of old people who feel a suicidal urge from the perspective of pastoral counselling. By engaging my interdisciplinary team, on the one hand, and employing transversal rationality, on the other hand, I hope that this study helped to better understand those old people who are driven to extreme decisions from different perspectives.

In an attempt to construct new stories, the researcher kept in contact with the co-researchers by phone and messengers. Re-telling of the stories enriches and gives true and live meaning to the stories. By re-storying, people are able to enrich and transform their stories into something true and live. A positive self-ego emerged in the process of delivering and redelivering. At last, the co-researchers were able to escape the dominant voices in their lives, find new stories irrelevant to the previous problematic stories, and reconstruct new stories and even reconstruct the reconstructed stories.

### **1.1.5 Ethical Considerations**

Narrative research and qualitative research are useful for reflecting on the perspectives of the socially marginalised and for carrying out research on such social phenomena as elderly suicide, which is not yet sufficiently studied. Notwithstanding, research must take into account more considerations than those principles suggested by the ethics commissions. Narratives may do harm to vulnerable research participants by opening up their forgotten wounds or suppressing them. Research can be accompanied by convoluted ethical problems and dilemmas. Concerning the complexity of ethical problems in the course research, Zygmunt Bauman published *Post-Modern Ethics* in 1993, whose key arguments are summarised by Plummer as follows:

“..... the contemporary ethical position must recognise ambivalence, non-rationality, the aporetic, the non-universalisable, and irrational ..... contradictions and tensions cannot

be overcome, they have to be lived with in struggle and disagreement”(Plummer, 2001:229).

As the excerpt shows, contemporary perspectives on ethics are so complex that it is very dangerous for a research to document the lives of others and deal with ethical issues *ad hoc*. Researchers may be able to help others by means of narrative research. At the same time, while documenting the lives of others, they must ask themselves, “By what right can an academic enter the subjective worlds of other human beings and report back to the wider world on them?” We must ask ourselves some ethical questions relating to performing research on the lives of others (Mark Davis et al, 2014:106).

- Must our understanding of someone’s life correspond with their understanding of their life? If they differ, what is the most responsible thing for us to do? Do our intellectual and ethical responsibilities pull us in different directions?
- Should we share our ‘findings’ with our research participants? In what circumstances would it not be desirable to do so?
- What is the effect of our probing presence?
- How universal are ethics?

The reason why researchers ask those questions is because narratives are related to power. An important consideration in research is any potential losses due to power positioning, i.e., possible power inequalities. According to Arthur Frank (1995), stories effect people, who are either speakers or listeners. Thinking with stories is a “process in which we as thinkers do not so much work on narrative as to take the radical step of allowing narrative to work on us” (David Morris, 2001:55) “Narratives work on us …… partly by engaging emotion …… emotion flows through channels of cultural thinking that underwrite or permit certain behavior …… The emotion implicit in narrative provides a valuable resource …… in the formation of moral knowledge and ethical action” (David Morris, 2001:65-66). It is the point of emotion that makes ethics particularly important in narratives. We should consider ethical situations for the above-mentioned reasons when we perform narrative research (Kate de Medeiros, 2014:99).

Language and narrative are not neutral. Power dynamics play a role in both. Power inscribed in language may exist on such a basic level as the meaning of words or structures of narratives. In addition, major cultural narratives may reinforce cultural norms, and in so doing specific narratives may be put to silence. Ethical considerations involve such questions as, what becomes of spoken stories and whether the object of a narrative research has access to his or her own stories.

For these reasons, the researcher of a living person must take seriously the following important considerations (Mark Davis et al, 2014:107):

- Confidentiality: can this ever be really guaranteed?
- Honesty and the scandals of life stories
- How to present our research focus to those whom we study.
- What do our participants get out of participating in our research?
- Do people really understand what they are agreeing to?
- The effects of misrepresentation for individuals and communities.
- Inequalities of the interview relationship
- Moving from the private to public sphere

Ethics plays a crucial role in research, insofar as researchers and research participants think highly of stories and stories exert influence in the world. A researcher must be aware of and be prepared for ethical issues, and perform research in a careful, modest, creative way. “Ethics have to be produced creatively in the concrete situation, drawing from culture and history, and not a pattern of just ‘following rules’.” (Plummer, 2001: 227).

### **1.1.6 Chapter Outlines**

Chapter 1 describes my story in order to explain what has led me to this research. Then, in establishing the direction of the study, the need and goal of the study are explained. Research ethics are also discussed as well as the research design in terms of the relationships between construction, deconstruction, and reconstruction.

Chapter 2 explains the epistemology and the methodology of this research. To explain

the epistemology, the narrative approach and social constructionism are discussed. In explaining the change in epistemological perspective from modernism to postmodernism, the concept of postfoundationalism is explained with special reference to van Huyssteen. Concepts like rationality or transversal rationality, interpreted experience, and interdisciplinary conversation are discussed. This led to the discussion of postfoundational practical theology as developed by Müller. The seven movements that Müller developed as a way of doing a postfoundational practical theology, through a narrative social constructionist approach are also discussed. Last, narrative research, qualitative research, and pastoral care are discussed.

Chapter 3 is devoted to the description of the cultural understanding of elderly suicide in Korea. Literary texts form the foundation of age studies. Hence, novels that deal with elderly suicide are analysed in terms of the motive for and method of suicide in order to present Korean cultural understanding of elderly suicide. From the perspective of social constructionism, suicide can be affected by social institutions and powers, therefore, it is a meaningful study to consider how the perspectives of Korean writers on elderly suicide have changed.

Chapter 4 reports on in-depth interviews with four co-researchers using a narrative research method or similar qualitative research method. It will start with the introduction of the co-researcher, with special reference to the reasons why he or she has been chosen. The focus will be on the dialogue with the co-researcher, and will describe a reflection on his or her story. The co-researchers will read one suicide note and two newspaper reports that deal with suicide, and be asked three questions. In this way, the co-researchers were expected to expand their own perspectives on suicide to evoke ideas needed for the construction of their own myths. In this chapter, as Müller argues, the basic epistemological method of postfoundationalism, the research method of social constructionism, and the narrative approach play important roles in integrating the story of the co-researcher with the socio-cultural and traditional values and themes into one whole.

Chapter 5 reports on the dialogue with four interdisciplinary scholars in order to intensify the narratives of the co-researchers. To begin with, the interdisciplinary scholars were

introduced and it was explained why they have been chosen. They were asked four questions devised by Müller. The four questions are as follows: 1. Are there any portions of each story that have drawn special attention or interest from you? 2. In reading those portions, have you recalled any ideas, emotions, or images? 3. Please explain if there is anything that is associated with your experiences, thoughts, or values? 4. Are there any new thoughts, new findings, or new meanings that are related to your life?

The feedback from these interdisciplinary scholars are summarised. The researcher's own reflections on the interdisciplinary conversations are presented with a look at the similarities and differences mentioned in their reflections. By way of conclusion, chapter 6 discusses the meanings of this study and offers suggestions for further studies.

## **2. Positioning and Methodological Concern of the Research**

### **2.1 Research Positioning**

#### **2.1.1 Narrative Perspective**

Everyone has many stories to tell concerning his or her own life and experiences. According to White (1990:13), people give meaning to their lives and relationships by storying their experience and in interaction with others in the performance of these stories, they are active in the shaping of their lives and relationships. Life stories are shaped through the process of cultural discourse and individuals carry them on (Michael White, 2011:8).

There are many different types of narratives, arranging from written text, verbal speech to non-verbal gestures. The core of narrative is that it is a set of signs that contain meaning. The meaning is generated through the narrative and it “must also carry some particular, rather than only general, meanings” (Mark Davis et al, 2014:177). What narrative research does is to look at the truths of stories or at the narrative truths. This means that the stories will be used as resources for the research; in other words, the researchers are interested in what the stories can tell them about the narrators and their realities.

A narrative perspective is not so much about the meaning of truth as about how it is formed and maintained. In this vein, one recalls the relation between power and knowledge.

Foucault (1975:27), for example said, “We should admit ..... that power produces knowledge (and not simply by encouraging it because it serves power or by applying it because it is useful); that power and knowledge directly imply one another; that there is no power relation without the correlative constitution of a field of knowledge, nor any knowledge that does not presuppose and constitute at the same time power relations.



Power exerts influence on the behaviour, attitude, discourse, learning process, and everyday life on the part of the members of each society. White writes that we tend to internalise the “dominant narratives” of our culture, easily believing that they speak the truth of our identities (Freedman & Combs, 1996:38-39). The dominant narratives forestall other possible narratives. Yet, we are able to imagine new realities in stories. While we may seem to be atomised parts, we are at the same time members that constitute an organic institution and lead a communal life in close relation to others. We can deconstruct dominant narratives through the process of story-making, thereby making the world different from when it was otherwise. A narrative perspective helps to “unpack” some narratives that are informed by cultural power (Michael White, 2011:5). It involves conversations with other people and induces interactions in communal spaces. There is no hierarchy between subject and object (Freedman & Combs, 1996:172). The difference between author and reader and between me and others is meaningless; they are neither two nor one. A researcher and a co-researcher are on par with each other. A narrative perspective pursues cooperative relations characterised by continuous interactions and mutual learning in the process of story-making. Through such a cooperative conversation, a researcher and a co-researcher encounters the world with which they are familiar in a new way, discover hidden meanings of the world, and are ultimately liberated from oppressive prejudices.

A narrative is created by the narrator and the audience, and the two parties work together to form and understand the narrative in a significant way. It is not a process that is thought out precisely but one that takes place naturally. This can be clearly found in the context of temporal coherence, for “many conversational narratives are incomplete and only get completed in and through the interaction between the participants in the storytelling event” (Mark Davis et al, 2014:558). It is important to understand that the narrators are not isolated individuals but participants in creating a narrative.

Using a narrative perspective, the co-researchers’ were able to see their past lives through their own eyes, drawing from their past lived experiences. By re-telling their past stories, they were able to seek the meanings hidden in the stories, meanings that they did not know in the past. As Hayden White (1980:23) notes, “narrative shows us a meaning in events that was immanent all along.” By finding important meaning in the narrative, we

do not remove the past but project the meaning of the past into the future, also known as narrative as destiny. Therefore, by ret-elling their past narratives, they not only found the meaning of their lives in the past but also discovered the future. Life is not lived in an orderly manner; instead, “as actors we are able, through narrative construction and reconstruction, actively to impose some order, some intelligibility on events, retrospectively” (Tina Miller, 2005:9). By looking at the life events of the co-researchers, I had been able to help them to find meaning and reason for the present from their past.

Co-researchers are not passive watchers but personal agents who become an agentic self through dual landscapes and discover meanings hidden in their own stories in their own contexts, through which they reconstruct the world in a creative way and perceive themselves in a deeper way (Freedman & Combs, 1996:97). However, this process is not a simple or a quick one. Müller (1999:37) even compares it to striking a gold vein, a process of adventure. Once an event is identified as being preferred by a personal agency, it is to be linked with other preferable events across time, as a result of which stories become enriched. Personal agency is empowered to associate those stories with other situations of the past and the future. Michael White (1993) calls the kind of history that results from this process a “history of the present” (Freedman & Combs, 1996:100).

A narrative perspective can be found within the framework of postfoundationalism and social constructionism; it is concerned with finding different meanings and the effects of stories on people within social interactions (Freedman & Combs, 2002:191).

### **2.1.2 Social Constructionism**

The concept of social constructionism started with the book titled *The Social Construction of Reality* by Berger and Luckmann (1966). Along with the postmodernist theory, constructionism has changed to social constructionism in the 1990s.

Hoffman (1990:2) quotes Gergen (1985:268) as saying, “The move [from constructivism to social constructionism] is from an experiential to a social epistemology.” That is, there is a shift from focusing on how an individual person constructs a model of reality from his or her individual experience to focusing on

how people interact with one another, construct, modify, and maintain what society holds to be true, real, and meaningful. It is social epistemology that attracts us to social constructionism (Freedman & Combs, 1996:26, 27).

In studying social phenomena, social constructionism pays close attention to the way in which social realities are formed and social identities are regulated. It is assumed that when we are confined to any objective causality, we may not be able to recognise the subjective world composed of language and discourse. It is also believed that we come to have a certain belief in a certain context. “Social constructionism’s main premise is that the beliefs, values, institutions, customs, labels, laws, divisions of labour, and the like that make up our social realities are constructed by the members of a culture as they interact with one another from generation to generation and day to day” (Freedman & Combs, 1996:16). Social constructionism questions what is taken for granted by people and argues that present beliefs are not absolute but changeable. “In the social constructionist view, the experience of the self exists in the ongoing interchange with others” (Kathy Weingarten, 1991:289). “If we were really to adopt these new ways of thinking and perceiving we would become responsible for continually constituting ourselves as the people we wanted to be. We would have to examine taken-for-granted stories in our local culture, the contexts we moved in, the relationships we cultivated, and the like, so as to constantly re-author and update our own stories” (Freedman & Combs, 1996:17).

The concept of self is also different when viewed from the perspective of social constructionism. We experience ourselves in constant interactions with others (Kathy Weingarten, 1991:289). As a social constructionist, we regard ourselves as being constructed by ourselves in relation with others, rather than as something central, essential, or predetermined (Freedman & Combs, 1996:17). Thus social constructionism helps us to redefine beliefs that are taken-for-granted and interpret the situations around us in a different manner.

Social constructionism is a philosophy of community (Katerin, D. K., Isabel, D., Ida, F., & Gerrit, L., 2004:75). As a qualitative, entire, and discursive approach, social constructionism asserts that such important human problems as race, gender, sexual

orientation, emotions, and psychological diseases are socially constructed. Whereas constructionism looks at the reality in terms of personal thoughts, social constructionism regards knowledge or entities as something artificially constructed in the context (Schwandt, T. A., 1998:75). Social constructionism analyses and discloses social interactions and causal processes with a view to revealing how causal processes engender and establish the present entity or fact (Ian Hacking, 1999:48). From a social constructionist perspective on entities, human understanding is not formed by personal thoughts but rather constructed by people belonging to a society. Beliefs in entities come from no so much individual as social framework. From the perspective of social constructionism, therefore, it is important to understand stories as cultural and conceptual (Mair, 1988:127).

It may be noted that social constructionism has brought about changes in healing processes. “We no longer organise our experiential worlds in terms of ‘information’ and ‘pattern.’ We think in terms of ‘stories’ rather than ‘systems.’ We think about ‘culture’ or ‘society’” (Freedman & Combs, 1996:18). Hence, social constructionism will not only be applied to the narratives of the co-researchers, but also used by the researcher to understand the co-researchers and to communicate with them through stories.

### **2.1.3 Postfoundationalism**

The apparent antithesis between modernism and postmodernism seems to be so overwhelming that one may be tempted to abstain from validating their perspectives. Instead, one may want to steer a middle course between modernism, which seeks the unified objective knowledge, and postmodernism, which is based on extreme relativism.

#### **2.1.3.1 Modernism and Foundationalism**

Modernism regards scientific knowledge as objective and thus foundational, because it is based on scientific reason and methods, unlike traditional religious beliefs, which are basically non-rational. From a modernist perspective, religious faith is not so much objective as subjective and less rational than scientific knowledge, which can be verified empirically. As a corollary, it is impossible or meaningless for science to engage in

dialogue with non-scientific disciplines. Conversations between science and other disciplines, if any, are conducted not so much on a par with each other in such a way that the rational knowledge of science determines the extent to which the knowledge of other disciplines is rational. As Müller (2009:203) points out, “with a foundationalist approach the only possibility is to seek for a universal perspective and therefore work towards assimilation and incorporation.” One might have the impression that the sway of the modernist belief that there are absolute, natural, and objective truths is not easily undermined even by the attack of postmodernism.

One may object, however, that modernist preference for scientific reason and objective knowledge cannot categorically reject theology as based on irrationality, since not only religious but also scientific knowledge is something that is construed by real scholars, who themselves are socially conditioned. Instead, one might want to argue that rationality exists, in one form or another, in both theology and science. The possibility that religious experiences are rational, though not in a scientific sense, is reinforced by the observation that one does choose a religious conviction or deed for a certain “reason,” which is rational, at least, to the experiencing agent. This view enables cross-cultural dialogue between disciplines that seek different truth claims, which are pursued and validated via distinct kinds of reasons.

### **2.1.3.2 Postmodernism and Nonfoundationalism**

Postmodernism challenges the assumptions of not only science but also of religion, insofar as it refuses to accept the foundationalist belief that there exists absolute truths or objective knowledge. Instead, postmodernism, in tandem with non-foundationalism, foregrounds the inevitable contextuality of every truth claim. Along the lines of postmodernism, one might argue that neither science nor theology can be considered epistemologically foundational. In particular, postmodernism challenges the alleged scientific knowledge, on the basis of which modernism argues other less rational knowledge should be judged. Postmodernists call attention to the possibility that scientific research is conducted in such a way that it is reflected or inflected, to a greater or lesser extent, by the pre-understanding of researchers, which is constructed by their socio-cultural matrix. To the extent that one’s pursuit of objective knowledge is informed

by one's interpreted experience, scientific knowledge or reason is to be considered a result of not so much a natural as a social phenomenon. Then, not only religious discourses but also scientific knowledge is inscribed with socio-cultural connotations, as they reflect the human agents' interpreted experiences. In this sense, both religious and scientific narratives are better construed as local, temporal, and contextual.

It is equally important, however, to be aware of the possibility that postmodernism may become deconstructive rather than constructive by focusing on the locality and contextuality of every truth claim. In advocating extreme relativism, postmodernism seems to be going too far. Nonfoundationalist relativism, which overemphasises the contextuality of all knowledge, prevents us from making sense of the intelligibility between scientific and religious knowledge. Postmodernism may play a constructive role in demystifying modernist foundations by disillusioning their alleged objectivity or naturalness. Thus construed, not only religion but also science is a social, cultural phenomenon, but only to a certain extent.

One suspects that truth claims need to be validated in terms of inter-contextual rationality as well as intra-contextual locality and temporality. Instead of jettisoning rationality in order to foreground the locality and contextuality of scientific or religious assumptions, one might well posit that such truth claims are informed by human rationality as well as social context. This observation opens the door for an interdisciplinary dialogue, inasmuch as a certain kind of trans-contextual rationality is assumed across disciplines, in addition to the contextuality of each discipline. A cross-disciplinary conversation is possible only when science and religion stop asserting that they only provide absolute "truths," which should be embraced as epistemic foundations. Hence, a constructive postmodernist perspective helps to view theology as a partner in rational cross-disciplinary dialogue, instead of either rejecting or taking for granted theological convictions.

If there is a sense in which postmodernism blurs modernist boundaries, for example, between religion and science, postfoundationalism attempts to construct a cross-disciplinary rationality and thus an interdisciplinary dialogue between them. One may suspect that there are various kinds of rationalities in diverse dimensions of knowledge.

Though religious reflections are not completely disconnected from the social matrix in which they are embedded, they may not be unintelligible either.

### **2.1.3.3 Postfoundational Rationality for an Interdisciplinary Dialogue**

Beyond the tension between modernism and postmodernism, some try to foreground rationality as a postfoundationalist notion that accounts, at least in part, for the relation between theology and science, on the assumption that the dimension of reason is not completely incompatible with that of faith. Instead of modernist meta-narratives, postfoundationalism seeks to construct a contextual or pragmatic rationality in the realms of both theology and science. The postfoundationalist conviction that rationality is compatible with contextuality is indeed significant (Seung Sung Oh, 2012:11). In answering the question whether science has finally claimed rationality at the expense of religious faith and theological reflection, van Huyssteen argues that, “rationality is alive and well in all the domains of our human lives” (van Huyssteen, 1999:2). Instead of choosing between modernism and postmodernism, van Huyssteen attempts, via a postfoundationalist notion of rationality, to construct a broader model of human rationality that reveals shared resources of theological and scientific forms of reflection, “beyond the epistemological dichotomy of foundationalist objectivism and nonfoundationalist relativism” (van Huyssteen, 1999:8).

In attempting to steer a middle course between foundationalist objectivism and non-foundationalist relativism, postfoundationalism enables us to posit a rationality shared by both science and religion, while admitting truth claims peculiar to each discipline. Despite their distinct interests, both religion and science deal with epistemic rationality as well as experience (van Huyssteen, 1997:4). The rationality of religion and that of science is not so much mutually exclusive as complementary in that if one gives "rational" answers to scientific questions, the other also gives "rational" answers to religious questions. One need not jettison the rationality of religious or scientific knowledge in order to foreground the fact that it is informed by a specific culture, tradition, and interpreted experience (van Huyssteen, 1996:110-111). In seeking a shared rationality between religion and science, a postfoundational optic need not view their contextually constructed truth claims as a barrier to interdisciplinary conversations

between them, which are made possible through such rationality.

The rationality of religious knowledge lies in social and religious contexts rather than in a vacuum. According to van Huyssteen (1999:57-58), “the acceptance of theories in theology, as in science, should only be determined by responsible rational judgement as a carefully developed and local epistemic skill and that this skill will enable us to determine contextually the theoretical and experiential adequacy of a specific theology.” Postfoundationalism thus embraces a fallibilist epistemology, which recognises the role of traditional experience, personal commitment, interpretation, and the provisional and fallibilist nature of all of our knowledge claims (van Huyssteen, 1999:86). Along these lines, a postfoundationalist theology takes seriously not only a person’s experiential narratives but also human rationality, both of which would help to validate the legitimacy of theological reflections. Focus should be laid on whether or to what extent epistemic and hermeneutic knowledge are interrelated or interdependent.

#### **2.1.4 Postfoundationalist Practical Theology**

In the previous section, we have evaluated aspects of modernism and postmodernism and have seen that postfoundationalism offers a way to integrate them in a creative way in terms of practical theology. Practical theology began as a part of theology in the late eighteenth century in German Protestantism (Pattison & Woodward, 2000b:2). Practical theology should be descriptive and hermeneutic insofar as it provides new meanings and horizons in specific contexts. After critical thinking and interpretations are completed, practical theology reconstructs them. Various questions are asked in all possible contexts. It reveals the ways in which people think and act in specific situations (Browning, 1996:49). Practical theology describes our situation, interprets previous findings, translate them into Christian norms, and constructs a model of Christian practice. This process inevitably involves hermeneutics and epistemology. In order to achieve the goal of this process, practical theology needs to use epistemology and rationality in a different way from what they were used in traditional methodology.

Seung Sung Oh (2012:339) argues in *Postfoundationalism and Christian Faith* that Kathleen A. Cahalan clearly shows the concept of postfoundationalism in practical



theology. Appropriating Lakeland's classification of criticism of modernism into three types, Cahalan classifies practical theology into three types (2005:65-66). According to Lakeland, the first response to modernism is the late moderns. Along the lines of Habermas, the late moderns view the project of enlightenment as incomplete and try to complete it by continuously considering the possibility that ethics or politics is justified on the basis of universal principles or meta-narratives. The second response is the counter modern. The counter modern tries to restore the unique traditions of communities, with the conviction that the truth cannot exist apart from the traditions of communities. The third response is the radical postmoderns. Like the postmodernists, the radical post-moderns do not look for universal norms. Unlike the counter modern, the radical post-moderns do not try to restore the authoritative traditions of communities.

According to Cahalan, these three philosophical responses to modernity affected practical theology and produced three types of practical theology. The type of practical theology, analogous to the late moderns, is fundamental practical theology represented by D. S. Browning. This type of practical theology which is analogous to the counter modern is practical theology based on Christian practices represented by Heitink (Brian C. Macallan, 2014:56). The type of practical theology which is analogous to the radical post-moderns is praxis-based practical theology represented by liberation theology, feminist theology, and contextual theology.

First, Browning, who represents the fundamental type of practical theology, solves the weak points of Tillich's correlational method by accepting the critical philosophy of the Frankfurt school and the hermeneutic theories of Ricoeur and Gadamer, thereby establishing his own methodology of practical theology (Cahalan, 2005:67-73). To Browning, Christian theology means a critical dialogue between the implicit questions and explicit answers provided Christian classics, on the one hand, and the explicit questions and implicit answers provided by modern cultural experiences and practices, on the other hand. This revised correlational method starts with belief but soon enters into a public dialogue and looks for the foundations of universal validity. Therefore, practical theologians investigate the religious practices and meanings of communities in

the light of not only the traditional interpretations of the Bible but also extrabiblical, sociological knowledge. Any traditional religious traditions, if proven to be unfounded by such an investigation, should be corrected. Besides, any social knowledge, if proven to be wrong by a religious tradition, should be corrected.

Second, practical theology based on Christian practices takes seriously the practice of Christian life (Brian C. Macallan, 2014:56). Heitink makes much of the empirical data of religious communities (Heitink, 1999:221). Practical theology based on Christian practices is not interested in any other narratives than Christian narratives. Any other narratives other than Christian narratives are not only irrelevant but also detrimental to traditional narratives. Heitink mentions that, “how people understand the words of Scripture and apply these in a concrete situation is in part determined by their historical context... traditions within the group to which they belong” (Heitink, 1999:196). In other words, traditional wisdom handed over from the past is considered to be the best and most dynamic for the establishment of the identity of the Christian community even in postmodern times. Along these lines, pastors teach the community and help them to put what they have learned into practice.

Third, praxis-based practical theology investigates the implications of Christian theology in relation to the questions raised in specific situations in which the congregation is located. The primary concern of theology is with local culture, and orthopraxis is more valued than orthodoxy because of the conviction that it is important to transform existing irregularities. Praxis-based practical theology moves beyond white, male, European theology to liberation theology and feminist theology. For example, James Cone considers the history, culture, and experiences of black people to be more important in doing theology than the Bible, tradition, and revelation (James H. Cone, 1990:29). Such feminist theologians as Chung Hyun Kyung accepts the various experiences of women having a special place in life as a starting point of theological introspection (Brian C. Macallan, 2014:110). For them, the primary task of pastoral ministries is to proclaim the gospel of justice and liberation to church and society. Pastors should awaken the congregation so that they can critically view the social realities and proclaim the message

that demands the transformation of oppressive and distortive political and economic systems.

Cahalan attempts to critically integrate these three types of practical theology and construct postfoundationalist practical theology. The three types have the following in common. Practical theology is an interdisciplinary discipline (86). Practical theology is widely related to every branch of theology including biblical theology, historical theology, ethics, and systematic theology, and dialogues with other disciplines is essential to the construction of practical theology. In addition, practical theology is interested in subject-in-community (87). Therefore, practical theology is not so much solo art but communal art (87). Such concepts as Interdisciplinarity, subject-in-community, and communality become intertextual principles that postfoundationalism develops positively.

Being aware that foundationalism and nonfoundationalism need foundations of theological discourse, van Huyssteen(1999:113) also argues for the need of postfoundationalist theology. According to van Huyssteen, postfoundationalist theology admits the role of context, pays attention to the decisive epistemological influence of experiences on interpretation, and admits that traditions play a role in the construction of religious values. Postfoundationalism views theological considerations as moving beyond the limitations of local, social, and cultural background and enabling a dialogue with other contexts and cultures. As van Huyssteen points out, postfoundationalism transcends the objectivism of foundationalism and extreme relativism of nonfoundationalism and enables interdisciplinary dialogue. It does not hurt our faith and belief but allows rational reason for other types of thinking than ours (Shults, 1986:87). Müller (2005:3) says, “Postfoundationalist practical theology should be seen as a way of understanding within the paradigm of the hermeneutical approach.” We need to not only evaluate but also make sense of both modernism and postmodernism and as Müller says, postfoundationalism is an attempt to incorporate them in a creative way. Müller (2004:4) calls this the third way. According to Müller, postfoundationalism is the third way to avoid the obstinacy and ruin of modernism and foundationalist theology and escape the

fantasy of postmodernism.

The rationality of postfoundationalism can provide a basis and explanation for the ways in which people think, act, and make a choice, because there are realms shared by people in terms of epistemology and reality (van Huyssteen, 1999:239; 1997:39). By means of the interpretation of experiences, we are epistemologically related to the world. We can share and create our lives through experiences. This accounts for the dynamic interrelationships between interdisciplinary dialogue. This rationality of postfoundationalism is further developed into transversal rationality by Schrag or van Huyssteen. Through transversal rationality, the rationality of postfoundationalism provides a common basis for communication between people of different beliefs and cultures. The transversal rationality of postfoundationalism enables theology to connect with other disciplines (Müller, 2009:203).

When practical theology is constructed from a postfoundationalist perspective, practical theology is considered to be interrelated to the other areas of theology, including biblical studies, historical theology, ethics, and systematic theology, and interdisciplinary conversations with those areas of theology pay attention to subject-in-community as an essential element of practical theology (Kathleen A. Cahalan, 2005:87). Postfoundationalist practical theology, due to its interest in interdisciplinary conversations and subject-in-community, is performed in dialogue with other disciplines such as history, ethics, and sociology (van Huyssteen, 2000:430). Thus, practical theology is communal rather than individual. In other words, the interdisciplinary features, subject-in-community, and communal characteristics of practical theology compose the principle of intertextuality, which postfoundationalism intends to develop.

Postfoundationalist theology enables the creative fusion of hermeneutics and epistemology. If we want to find a consistent explanation of all our experiences, we must seek to find a uniform world view. According to van Huyssteen, the perspective of postfoundationalism explains in this regard that we are epistemologically related to the world by means of perceived experiences (1997:15). Individual experiences not only maintain their own legitimacy and objectivity, but they are also supported by the

technical knowledge shared by communities. Van Huyssteen admits that a postfoundationalist network of belief enables the interpretation of experiences (1999:186). Our knowledge of reality shows information produced by the interpretation of our experiences. Therefore, those things which are related to us depend on the correlation between the way in which we experience the world and the way in which we look at the world. Our lives and experiences are created in vivid social realities.

Müller understands the values of postfoundationalist theology and feels the need to apply them to practical theology. To begin, Müller (2004) adapts the basic concepts of van Huyssteen’s postfoundational theology to develop his own postfoundational practical theology. Burger (2014:29) briefly cites the position of van Huyssteen and compares it Müller’s practical theology as follows.

Postfoundational Theology	Postfoundational Practical Theology
<p>...a Postfoundationalist Theology wants to make two moves. First, it fully acknowledges contextuality. The epistemically crucial role of <b>interpreted experience</b>, and the way that <b>tradition</b> shapes the epistemic and nonepistemic <b>values</b> that inform our reflection about God and what some of us believe to be <b>God’s presence</b> in this world. At the same time, however, a Postfoundationalist notion of rationality in theological reflection claims to <b>point creatively beyond the confines of the local</b> community, group, or culture towards a plausible form of interdisciplinary conversation (van Huyssteen, 1997:4).</p> <p>(Some phrases written in bold by Julian Müller)</p>	<p>A. <u>The context &amp; interpreted experience</u>            1. A specific context is described.            2. In-context experiences are listened to and described.            3. Interpretations of experiences are made, described and developed in collaboration with “co-researcher”.</p> <p>B. <u>Traditions of interpretation</u>            4. A description of experiences as it is continually informed by traditions of interpretation.</p> <p>C. <u>God’s presence</u>            5. A reflection on God’s presence, as it is understood and experienced in a specific situation.</p> <p>D. <u>Thickened through interdisciplinary investigation</u>            6. A description of experience, thickened through interdisciplinary investigation.</p> <p>E. <u>Point beyond the local community.</u>            7. The development of alternative interpretations that point beyond the local community.</p>

Thus Müller developed postfoundationalist theology into postfoundationalist narrative counselling practical theology. Müller's research process is composed of seven movements. Müller (2004:300) explains van Huyssteen's basic concepts of postfoundationalist theology in a new language and developed it into postfoundationalist practical theology.

Müller's postfoundational practical theology follows the same points and process as postfoundational theology. He argues that practical theology should develop from very concrete and specific moments (Müller, 2004:294). As emphasised in postfoundationalist practical theology, according to Müller, practical theology is of no use in ordinary situations, which are neither concrete nor specific. Traditionally, theology starts with the text, which provides norms for practices. Hence, practical theology has been treated as trivial in theology. However, a holistic approach to theology should be practical from the start. Any theology which deals with abstract lives, which are not concrete, is meaningless (Brownings, 1996:7). Müller thinks that practical theology should always be local and concrete in order to be applied to other contexts. Postfoundational epistemology is contextual, but it admits that our epistemology is shaped by traditions (Müller, 2005:77).

As the methodology of postfoundationalist practical theology is introduced, counselling also needs to be understood from the perspective of postfoundationalism. Therefore, I will attempt to make a contribution to the understanding of pastoral care in the South Korean church by applying the process of Müller's postfoundationalist practical theology to the context of the South Korean church. Through postfoundationalist practical theology, a researcher will be able to find different meanings and possibilities from specific situations and the stories of people. In my view, postfoundationalist practical theology, by definition, requires open-mindedness, which is the key that opens the door to solving the problems within my research.

As a researcher, I position myself within the paradigm of postfoundational practical

theology of narrative counselling. The overall design and process of this study are based on Müller's seven movements. The researcher will attempt to share elderly people's identities and life orientations reflected in their stories, at the same time trying to help them to find a Christian community embedded within their life settings by thematising God's story. Postfoundational practical theology of narrative counselling is a hermeneutic event that deals with the context of encounters with God and human experiences (Louw, 1995:96-97).

This process implies a dialogical relationship, in terms reminiscent of a hermeneutic concept of communal understanding, between the issues and problems involved in particular human situations and the core metaphorical meanings of the Christian story. In this dialogue within narrative practical theology, both stories become open to continuous evaluation and reinterpretation; thus, the research never ends, but has an open ending as a new story (Müller et al 2001:90; Gerkin, 1986:60; 1991:19). In order to understand the thoughts and emotions of Korean elderly people, it is necessary to do research on the ways in which Korean culture has negative influences on their lives and, in particular, on their perspectives regarding suicide. Using a narrative form, I would like to re-author a Christian life that enables them to overcome such negative influences, and construct an alternative narrative in which they can be co-actors in God's story. In a non-knowing position, the researcher will listen to the various voices of the co-researchers and reconstruct hopeful future stories with a view to creating spacious room for reorganising and modifying their lives (W. J. Bausch, 1984:29-63).

## **2.2 Research Framework**

### **2.2.1 Narrative Research**

Narrative research has many different descriptions and shares many traits with other forms of qualitative research. The main characteristic of narrative research is its focus on either the whole life or a part of it represented in the narrative text. It is all about

constructing, deconstructing, and reconstructing a story. In this section, the characteristics of narrative research are discussed.

Narrative research is widely used in contemporary social sciences. Narrative research deals with stories that are told by people, whether they are about their own experiences or fictional experiences. It must carry not only general but also some particular meanings. Whether meanings are personal or social, they must be based on real people not just statistics and science. Narratives build up human meanings and may not always rely on scientific equations, models, and theories. This means that there are limitations to where and when narratives can be understood. Therefore, narrative research must not only elicit information from a narrative but also interpret that information. It aims to “explore and conceptualise human experiences as it is represented in textual form” (Josselson, 2011:225).

Narrative research does not offer a clear starting or finishing point, insofar as there are “no self-evident categories on which to focus” (Andrew, Squire and Tamboukou, 2008:1). It is an interpretive process constructed from the joint efforts of the researcher and the participants. It seeks to capture the lived experience of people in terms of their own understanding. Therefore, narrative researchers are not interested in the factual truth but they seek interpreted truths, personal truths. So attention is paid to the context, both relational and social, in which the narrative is constructed (Josselson, 2011:226). Narrative gives participants a chance to voice their opinion; it could be for or against the social norm and it could show how they chose to voice their opinions. However, this does not mean that narrative research only focuses on personal experiences. Narrative research finds social and cultural differences in the information of the personal experiences. This means that through narrative research, researchers are able to find multiple layers of meanings which at times may seem to contradict each other, and work with the data in a way that they compromise each other. The researcher and the co-researcher must communicate and interact with each other in the process of story-telling and story-making. This process is called “reflection” in narrative therapy, and conversations transform the original perspective of discourse (Ruby, 1982:2). A conversation in the form of participant response on the part of a reflecting team is good for providing new stories that have been deconstructed (Freedman & Combs, 1996:172).



There are many different definitions of narrative, “such definitions may focus on stories as accounts of temporally ordered events, or as developing or expressing personal identity, or telling about the past, or making sense of mental states or emotions, or having particular social effects, or demonstrating formal linguistic properties” (Mark Davis et al, 2014:177). These definitions generally overlap and cannot be neatly sorted into categories. Narrative research assumes that people live and understand their lives in a story-like setting, with a beginning, middle, and an end. “These stories are played out in the context of other stories that may include societies, cultures, families, or other intersecting plotlines in a person’s life” (Josselson, 2011:224).

Narratives do not always have to be spoken orally; it could be transmitted *via* text as well. Narrative research uses thematic, discourse analysis, and other frameworks, but what is unique about it is the fact “that it endeavours to explore the whole account rather than fragmenting it into discursive units or thematic categories” (Josselson, 2011:226). Gathering narratives is usually conducted between one researcher and one narrative giver, and having another person present may distort the information of the person’s narrative. When more than one person’s perspective is needed, it is better to schedule multiple narrative-collecting sessions, meeting people individually and comparing the different narratives, rather than conducting a group session.

Due to the way in which the truth of the narrative is brought forward by the participant, “it became more and more difficult to regard people as research objects” (Müller & Schoeman, 2004:8). Therefore, phrases such as “co-researchers” or “research participants” are used instead. Likewise, while research is conducted, it is important to make sure that the participants are respected for their views and the research environment is a respectful one. Above all, the research must listen to the narratives and respect the narrators; the narrators should also be free from criticism from the researcher or other people who may be present at the time.

Research participants have big role in narrative research as they give the information that will be analyzed in the research. The whole focus of the researcher is to listen to the narrative from the narrators’ perspective and consider the meaning that they give to the narrative. It may or may not be lined with factual truths, but it is the truth for that

particular narrative. Therefore, it is important to hear the narrative from the perspective of the narrator, not from the perspective of an outsider. The researcher needs to fully understand how the narrator is telling the story. The researcher must make sure that he or she fully understands the research participants and builds up trustful relationships with them. This will influence the extent to which research participants tell their narratives. Participants should not be pressured into sharing their narratives but they should be encouraged to tell their stories. It is the researcher's responsibility to make sure that the participants are comfortable with sharing their narratives. It is important that the participants are respected for their narratives. In an attempt to ensure that the research participants are respected, I did not ask them to come to my office but I went to meet them in person.

### **2.2.2 Doing Postfoundationalist Practical Theological Research: The Seven Movements Developed by Müller**

This research attempted an interdisciplinary work within an epistemological framework of postfoundationalist practical theology, which subsumes social constructionism, poststructuralist theory, and the narrative approach, especially focusing on Müller's seven movements of methodology (2005:9-12). The seven movements were adopted for this research, by following the guidelines suggested by Müller.

#### **2.2.2.1 A Specific Context Described**

This section addresses the context/action and field/habitus of this research. The time and place of a story point toward the concrete time and place in which we are positioned. They are not, as Kant believed, atemporal or a *priori*. Stories are not incorporated into atemporal, a *priori* rationality but incorporated in an intersectional manner into the chronotope of time and place, which can be experienced in everyday life (Michael Bakhtin, 1981:84-85). Gerkin (1986:60) emphasises that practical theology emerges from a Christian praxis when he says, "The work of practical theology always takes place in the midst of praxis and is prompted by that situation of being in the midst." Furthermore Müller (2004:296) insists, "Practical theology is only possible as contextual practical theology. Practical theology cannot function in a general context. It is always

local, concrete and specific.” According to van Huyssteen (2006a:25), “because of our irrevocable contextuality and the embeddedness of all belief and action in the network of social and cultural traditions, beliefs, meaning, and action arise out of our embedded life worlds.” Therefore, this research relies heavily on the understanding of the context.

The contexts of old people of the S. church in the city of Pochun, an urban rural composite city that is an hour drive from Seoul were investigated. In order to prevent such factors as intelligence and faith from exerting a considerable influence on the results of the interviews, the degree of intelligence and faith on the part of the co-researchers was taken into account. The researcher participated in the meeting of elderly people at the S. church in order to form strong and trustworthy relationships with them. Then, he selected four co-researchers, listened to their life stories, and talked with them. In addition, he used newspaper accounts of elderly suicide and suicide notes left by elderly suicides for the interviews in order to do an in-depth narrative research and qualitative research. Suicide might be a result of reflection on the past rather than on the future. Suicide might also be an existential and meaningful act, intended to be a form of communication to others.

In particular, one’s own image of death is closely related to essential factors of life, including oneself, one’s own image of life, and one’s relation to others. Through the interviews, the researcher invited the co-researchers to think about the suicide of other people in relation to their own death or suicide; in so doing, they were able to reflect on their own life, predict the future, and reconstruct their remaining life. This type of constant introspection led us to think of what we should do and what kind of Christian we should be, thus laying the foundation for a better understanding of situations around us as well as ourselves.

The present researcher is especially interested in the life story related to elderly suicide for the following reasons. First, according to the statistics on causes of death (Statistics Korea, 2010), the number of people aged 65 or above who committed suicide increased from 314 in 1990 to 4,029 in 2008, an increase of approximately 12.8 times in 18 years. As shown in the table below, the suicide rate of people aged 60 or above is much higher than those of the other age groups. The suicide rate of people aged 70 or above is the highest. This statistical fact may well be not only a cause of serious despair but also a

threatening crisis to Korean society.

<Table 1> Suicide Rates of OECD Member Countries

Country	Suicide Rates according to Ages (per 100,000)							
	Age 15~24	25~34	35~44	45~54	55~64	65~74	Above 75	Total
Finland	20.8	26.0	20.1	22.9	16.9	16.5	12.4	16.5
France	9.4	17.2	19.6	22.4	18.4	21.3	18.9	14.6
Hungary	9.5	15.3	32.1	33.6	27.2	26.5	36.1	21.0
Japan	21.2	24.9	24.6	29.9	22.0	17.9	14.6	19.4
Korea	14.3	18.3	16.3	25.2	42.7	81.8	160.4	24.7

Source: OECD (2009)

Second, suicide has been a nationwide issue in Korean society since 2011. There have been unexpected news of suicides in the past three years, such as an ex-president, CEOs, famous entertainers, etc. Family suicide and mass suicide through SNS are also noteworthy. Although Korea's suicide rate remains top among OECD countries, many people have been indifferent to the issue of suicide. Rather, it seemed that they simply condemned every kind of suicide. As suicide types became diverse, including the suicide of society leaders, some books that dealt with suicide were published. For example, *The Meaning and Discourse of Death in Our Time* (Sun-Young Chun, 2012), *A Reflection on Suicide: A Perspective from the Humanities* (Jong-Gap Kim, et al., 2011), and *Study of Death* (Young-Ho Park, 2012) have encouraged the readers to become participants rather than spectators on the issue of suicide.

Third, it is my conviction that it is time that the issue of suicide should come under the spotlight in Korean society. The issue of suicide should be discussed as a matter of "living," rather than simply "knowing," for it is related to other factors such as biotechnology, the internet, multicultural, etc. Suicide is not simply a moral, ethical, or legal matter, but an ontological, communal issue that subsumes those areas (Rainer Forst, 2002:237). The new trend in suicides makes it necessary to form an intersubjective bond

through dialogues with other traditions (van Huyssteen, 1999:137-138).

Elderly suicide is a serious issue as more and more old people are considering suicide an option. There is no doubt that more research is needed. “As individuals encounter experiences across the life span and into old age, their personal meanings undergo transformation” (Moore, Sharon L., 1997). When people are subjected to adverse conditions in which life has lost meaning for them, they fail to see any reasons to live.

The elderly population consists of those aged 65 or above. It can be further divided into three categories: the young old, the middle old, and the oldest old (Choi & Jang, 2010). First, it is important to look at the different stages of life and their characteristics.

Different crisis are experienced at different stages of life. Capps views one’s fifties as “that period of life when one engages in a deeper self-process than was previously deemed necessary or even possible” (Capps, 2004). This may lead to unwanted loss of stability as they reflect on what they have become; it is possible to be alienated by themselves. “This may be a period of excruciating self-estrangement” (Capps, 2004). These self-reflections and the relationship people build within themselves have an impact on their relationships with other people. Capps (2004) names the crisis in one’s seventh decade “stagnation.” “Early sixty-year olds are aware that the time is fast approaching when they will be leaving the professional stage on which they performed since their twenties and thirties, and others will take their place.” While some may opt to take the graceful route of exit by choosing to nurture the next generation, others may be reluctant to leave their position and be replaced. At this point, elderly people may feel powerless and suicidal. “Increasing feelings of powerlessness emerged through descriptions of the disappointments and losses through which the participants were living” (Moore, Sharon L., 1997). Those in their seventies are afraid of death looming over them. In their eighties, people confront the problem of trust and distrust. Those in their nineties have to battle with shame and doubts they feel about themselves (Capps, 2004). This is linked with loss of self-control, and society alienates them further. “Older people are living and ageing in a society that values youth and beauty, healthy and strength—characteristics that often escape aged persons” (Moore, Sharon L, 1997).

I listened to and recorded the narratives of my research participants, the narratives of their lives. “The past story helps us to articulate and understand the present problem, so as to allow action towards another future” (Larner, Glenn, 1998). Inasmuch as narrative opens up the relation between the past and the future, it was possible to infer information for the future by listening to their experiences in the past. Past and future are connected, and “change is located not as a discontinuous break with the past, but at the point where past, present and future narrative meet.” Larner (1998) says that “in this sense the future is always already here, because it bears the mark of the past and disrupts the presence of the present.” Through narrative, these marks and disturbances can be found and traced down. For example, when Moore conducted an interview with elderly people who had attempted suicide and asked them about the meaning of life, “their brief descriptions of meaning were always tied to relational contexts, to the connections they had with other people in the past” (Moore, Sharon L., 1997).

Although Korean society recently began to discuss the issue of suicide or death, it seems to have misunderstandings and prejudices toward suicide, especially elderly suicide. Perhaps we are satisfied with such misunderstanding and prejudice, for suicide is such a burdensome issue. Yet, it must be remembered that people bereaved by suicide live in pain and despair for at least five years, or even for the rest of their lives. Moreover, suicide does not only ruin the life of the committer but also enhances the possibility of suicide on the part of those whom he or she has known—at least six people (McInrosh, 2000). How terrible it is! Suicide committers feel stuck in a dead end (*ēchec*), as if they are a total failure in despair. However, not everyone experiencing *ēchec* commits suicide but some persevere and overcome it. Human beings exist in significance. One’s perspective on death or suicide is not decided by the individual but is communally formed by society, culture, tradition, and history. For this reason, we need to redefine the essence of death or suicide. Failure on the part of society to enhance the quality of elderly life by preventing elderly suicide might mean death to millions of potential suicide committers.

The religious and cultural background of the experience stories of the co-researchers, who have lived a hard life for sixty years or more, undergoing Japanese colonialism, the Korean War, industrialisation, military dictatorship, with special reference to the issue of death or suicide were investigated. Lamott (1995:62) says, “Background is where you let

us see and know who these people are, how they've come to be together, what was going on before the opening of the story.” During the first stage of the interview, they will tell their stories of “now,” which is seen as a “thin description.” As the interview progresses and develops, it becomes clear that the co-researchers' stories reflect their current socio-political and economic background and cultural narrative. The therapists call this description around the problem and its meaning “thin description” (Morgan, 2000:12). Personal identity and narrative are established on the wide cultural identity narrative. According to Müller (1999:22), “Personal identity is determined by family identity, also which in turn is determined by a wider cultural identity. Every family, clan society, or a wider cultural group or system, has their own core stories from which derive their unique identity.” Each personal story develops in the broader narrative of the family, environment, and culture. In a personal narrative, therefore, there is the unavoidable influence of the individual on his/her family ecosystem and community group. It is only through interpreted experiences that we relate to realities. The world as phenomena reveals itself in a variety of human experiences. Diverse human experiences may cause resistance from others. Hence, the explications of realities are incursive.

As a narrative therapist and researcher, I employed postfoundationalism as a theoretical tool that enabled me to use narrative and social construction in relation to practical theology as the main methods of research. This position allowed me not only to focus on the ways in which to bring about changes, but also to listen to the stories of others and at the same time to be drawn into the stories. When we strive for participatory interaction through a narrative approach, “we want to accommodate this paradox or dialectic, which is a prerequisite for research with integrity” (Jae A. Yang, 2014:24). “We agree with Dreyer (1998:20) that it makes more sense for the researcher to embody the dialectic between the insider and outsider perspectives.” (Müller et al, 2001:2)

Methods employed:

- Four interviewees in total were interviewed; elderly men and women living in an urban rural composite city.
- The interviews were interpreted on a postfoundationalist and social-constructionist basis.
- Research on previous qualitative methods for interviews on elderly suicide were

conducted.

### 2.2.2.2 In-context Experiences Described

In this section, qualitative interviews with four people aged between 65 and 80 were conducted. This age group met with the needs of this study, for they experienced Japanese colonialism and the Korean War, in addition to the periods of industrialisation and the IMF (International Monetary Fund) crisis. I listened to their stories with a narrative approach to conduct qualitative interviews. In attempting to develop the “history of the present” (Freedman & Combs, 1996:100), I asked the co-researchers to identify social factors that contribute to present problems and the ways in which those factors were produced in the past and are reproduced in the present, and the kinds of harms and sacrifices they have had to suffer.

In employing a narrative approach, “we are interested in constructing an “agentive self” with people” (Freedman & Combs, 1996:97). A narrative identity links the question of what I am, with the question of who I am; while a narrative identity is interpreted as a story, the self is identified through and with the other (P. Ricoeur, 1996:155). Due to its dialectical characteristic between congruity and incongruity, a narrative identity is not a perfect identity. It is possible to make up several plots for the same event. Likewise, it is possible to construct contradictory stories for the same life. By changing a perspective, one can reconstruct his/her identity in a dynamic way, acting as storying agentive selves. Thus, realities are socially constructed *via* language and formed and maintained *via* narratives unfolding within social discourses (Freedman & Combs, 1996:22-35).

We construct our realities with stories. This perspective regards co-researchers as authors of stories. Therefore, the researcher views the co-researchers as the authors or agents, even as brothers who share the dark night of the truth (John Caputo, 1993:260). The researchers will ask the co-researchers, taking a posture of not-knowing. A not-knowing position is “a process in which people experience choice rather than ‘settled certainties’ with regard to the realities that they inhabit” (Freedman & Combs, 1996:44). The researcher does not speak about the co-researchers but speak with them. In order to better understand their in-context experiences, I listened to the stories of grandchildren,



children, spouses, and friends of my co-researchers. I also tried to engender an environment in which a thick description is possible by reconstructing events within the social structure, including regulations, institutions, prejudices, and stereotypes in the social, cultural context.

In doing narrative research, we need to listen to the experiences and stories of people through “qualitative interviewing.” The qualitative narrative interview is one of the major methods for doing narrative research and listening to people’s stories (Greenhalgh, Russell & Swinglehurst, 2005:444). Rubin (1995:3) states that “qualitative interviewers listen to people as they describe how they understand the worlds in which they live and work.” Qualitative interviewing is both an academic and a practical tool. It takes diverse methods that take seriously locality and, marginality for example, which have been overlooked in megastructures and meta-narratives, pays attention to natural situations or contexts, employs emergent and evolving approaches to generate hypotheses and theories, and looks at the world in a holistic and complex way (Marshall & Rossman, 2011:2). It also foregrounds the subjectivity of individuals and individual lives, and employs methods for exploring the social, historical, or cultural realities that individuals construct. By using the method of qualitative interviewing, the researcher is able to find out what the co-researchers feel and think about the world in which they live and work. Therefore, I attempted to understand and listen to the co-researcher’s experiences and their reconstruction of events. Thus, I helped my co-researchers to describe their stories, use their language, and seek out and create new meanings.

Methods employed:

- I listened to the stories of the co-researchers about Confucianism and the postmodernist culture.
- I listened to their traumatic experiences during colonialism, war and, military dictatorship.
- I listened to their stories as they are re-told in Christian language *via* conversations.

### **2.2.2.3 Interpretations of Experiences Made, Described, and Developed in Collaboration with the “Co-researcher”**

Co-construction and performance of stories are an important aspect of narrative research. It is clear that the co-researcher and the researcher work together to complete a story. Narrative performance is, “situated not only within the immediate conversation with the present, imagined audiences and surrounding rituals but also within broader discursive practices that shape language, experience and conversation” (Mark Davis et al, 2014:590). Identity is viewed as being constructed by presentations of parts of the self in an interaction with others. This may raise the question of stability and reliability of the concept of self but the debate revolving around *performativity* provides an answer. Performativity is not a simple presentation of our identity but it is the construction and reconstruction of the identity. That is when their stories are performed in front of a researcher they constitute the researcher by that performance. The narratives of my co-researchers interactively created meanings that they were affected by the interaction between me and them. “A narrative is never the result of the teller’s effort alone” (Mark Davis et al, 2014:611). Whether it is intended or not, the narrations of my co-researchers were affected by my presence.

We can take a “not knowing posture” in order to invite the co-researchers to the stage of “Bringing the World into Therapy” (White, 2011:3), thus eliciting an experiential participation. This section looks at how “the researchers are not only interested in descriptions of experiences, but also and foremost in their (co-researchers’) own interpretations. The researcher in this phase does not, in the first instance, look for data, but for meaning/interpretation given by the co-researchers.” (Müller, 2005:84). The researcher should focus more on the meanings and interpretations of the co-researchers’ stories rather than the researchers’ own “many skills,” “competencies,” “beliefs,” “values,” “commitments,” and “abilities,” because the co-researchers are the experts of their own lives and in how to reduce the influence of problems in their lives (Morgan, 2000:2). All kinds of stories help the interaction, balance, and collaboration between the researchers’ own interpretations and those of the co-researchers. As Müller (2001:77) describes it, the aim of research is not to bring about change, but to listen to the stories and to be drawn into those stories. I strived to listen to their stories and to understand their experiences as a friend and co-worker of life and faith, definitely not to change their lives but perhaps to lead them to a new story that would become meaningful to life.

In order to elicit new stories from the co-researchers and discover hidden meanings, Michael White, under the influence of Gregory Bateson and Michel Foucault, has devised an original idea about externalising matters (Nichols & Schwarz, 2009:455). By conducting an externalising conversation, which separates people from problems, one can change the subject and discover experiences that have been alienated from the problems. “Sparking events” are experiences that cannot be found when people are immersed in dominant stories. However, beautiful stories provide co-researchers with important experiences by which they can hold themselves in high regard. Michael White calls these overlooked beautiful experiences “unique outcomes” and calls the process for finding them “unique re-description.” These unique outcomes give meaning to the co-researchers. Unique stories help to find a link to other events, thus enabling one to make a story anew or revive a story.

I employed a narrative approach in order to help the co-researchers to reconstruct their identity in life. First of all, I attempted at externalising conversations. Specialised powers in modern society objectify human identities under the cloak of culture. The skills of power were thought to lie in adjusting people to their life and identity in accordance with the regulations they have made. The cultural truth that is defined by the skills of power is nothing but the category of identity that is preferred by the age (White, 2011:24). Externalising conversations thus enable us to recognise that standardised judgements are at the core of modern powers. Alternative methods for solving problems are available when people are separated from problems via externalising conversations and are not bound up with negative identities which are abnormal and dysfunctional. Externalising conversations that separate problems from humans make a contribution to the development and enhancement of a sense of responsibility. If a person is regarded as a problem, there is nothing to do but self-destructive behaviour. And yet, once the relation of humans and problems are externalised, there appear a number of methods for improving relations.

Michael White posits four categories of inquiry, which he himself names “The Statement of Position Map,” that refers to externalising questions that provide situations and contexts in which co-researchers themselves can talk about what they hold in high regard. These help the clients to recognise the position their problems take in their life and

whether or to what extent they worry for a reason. According to Michael White, externalisation, which begins with an initiative intention, takes place in the following order: Inquiry Category 1: Negotiating a Particular, Near Definition of the Problem; Inquiry Category 2: Mapping the effects of the Problem; Inquiry Category 3: Evaluating the Effects of the Problem's Activities; Inquiry Category 4: Justifying the Evaluation (White, 2007:38-54). Among a variety of skills of externalising problems, a method of naming problems is effective for identifying the true nature of a problem. When a problem is deconstructed (White, 1991:27), a client is liberated from the influence of the problem and is able to state what is important in his or her life and explain his or her preferred identity in-depth.

The story of a client is composed of two landscapes, i.e., consciousness and action. Here the landscape of action is the material of a story, a series of events making a plot and a theme. The landscape of consciousness includes the consciousness of the main character, including the meaning that the main character gives to an event, the commitment of the main character to the intent or purpose of the event, and the conclusion of the main character on the personality or identity of other characters on the basis of the event.

In the process of conversation, questions and answers in the landscapes of action and consciousness cross each other. At this point, co-researchers express the meaning of life they pursue in concrete language and talk about events in which such a meaning materialised in their life. This process in turn leads to a stage of speaking about their vision for the future. Michael White uses "The Statement of Position Map, Version 2" to refer to this scaffolding process that establishes an alternative story of the client, i.e., a conversation that builds a mould between the present and the future. We come up with the following order: Inquiry Category 1: Negotiating a Particular, Experience-Near Definition of the Unique Outcome; Inquiry Category 2: Mapping the effects of the Unique Outcome; Inquiry Category 3: Evaluating the Unique Outcome and its Effects; Inquiry Category 4: Justifying the Evaluation. Michael White concretely shows the process in which rich stories are developed from unique outcomes. I used "The Statement of Position Map, Version 2" as a practical guide.

Externalising conversations help to not only get rid of negative identities but also re-write

one's own stories. In other words, externalising conversations open the possibility of forming concepts and developing alternative stories (Morgan, 2000:24). Re-authoring conversations, which research into the deep structure of a story, are a circulating process in which one writes and rewrites stories continually. Through seeking and co-constructing alternative stories for the co-researchers, we were able to create new opportunities for cherished values to become more richly described. For this we wrote and edited stories, looking at both the negative and the positive aspects of it, at the same time laying the foundations for linking it to the events and meanings of new stories. I focused on re-authoring, trying to link to other areas of healing, such as externalising conversations, revision of members, responses of outside witnesses and definitional ceremony, and various certificates of merit and letters, and I developed the meanings provided by the co-researchers.

#### Methods employed

- By performing a narrative therapy in collaboration with the co-researchers, one can bring healing to the world, thus subverting modern power relations.
- Make use of impromptu performance to enrich and develop alternative stories. Listen and react to the narration of the co-researchers during the qualitative interviews. This may include additional questions or the extension of the interview.
- Broaden and diversify theoretical geography to sharpen ideas.

#### **2.2.2.4 A Description of Experiences Continually Informed by Traditions of Interpretation**

On the presupposition that human cognition is closely related to stories and traditions, this section sought to interpret in terms of communication the cognitions and actions reflected in specific communities to which the co-researchers belong. Since our cognition and experience are derived from tradition, the researcher told, listened to, and re-told traditional discourses. Traditions contain not only authoritative, uncritical, and isolated traditions, as criticised by the enlightenment, but also rational traditions that allow one to do introspection of oneself on the basis of new experiences. The criticism on the part of the enlightenment that tradition is uncritical is a consequence of misunderstanding. Tradition is always flexible and critical. We aimed to construct an “intelligible dramatic

narrative” by evaluating isolated traditions and open traditions where a tradition meets other traditions (Alasdair MacIntyre, 1997:156).

There is a close relation between narrative and tradition. Tradition concretises narratives in the historical context. Besides, tradition is recovered when a new narrative is created through the reconstruction of conflicting narratives at an epistemologically critical moment. Therefore, tradition is a bearer of reason, and the continuation of tradition needs a revolution that reconstructs narratives. Traditions are not exclusive but always open to other traditions. Conversational rationality occurs where a tradition meets another tradition (Alasdair MacIntyre, 1997:146-147). Conversational rationality exists neither beyond nor in tradition, but between traditions in a crossing and in multiple ways. There is no one Truth, as the modernist believes. Nor is it that, as postmodernists assert, there is no truth at all. There are truths between traditions.

Focusing on the voices, attitudes, etc. of the co-researchers through a narrative approach, the researcher attempts to obtain practical information not only on an individual level as to their individuality, uniqueness, peculiarity, rich diversity, subjectivity, autonomy, activeness, situational diversity, sensitivity, mood, and emotion, but also on a social level as to social realities and issues. A narrative approach enables one to better understand the meaning of life in the interactional context of time—the past, the present, and the future. In this research, adopting a narrative and social -constructionist perspective offered useful ideas on how to harmonise between who people think they are and who they really are. The narrative worldview proposes that, “human beings are interpreting beings and that we are active in interpreting our experiences as we live our lives” (White, 1995b:13). Freedman and Combs (1996:16) say, “We can understand not only people’s individual lives, but also cultural and societal which interact with an individual story through using narrative perspective and social construction.”

According to the narrative perspective, the researchers are not only interested in the description of experiences, but also and more importantly in people’s own interpretations (Morgan, 2000:2). The researcher, with the co-researchers, interpreted the narratives about elderly suicide. There were social mechanisms that circulate such existential issues as suicide in traditional societies. In modern society, in contrast, there is a tendency to

ideologise suicide. I analysed newspaper reports and suicide note narratives of suicide committers, in order to understand the dominant narrative of elderly suicide in our society and the way in which such narratives are constructed and circulated. One's understanding of suicide cannot be universal or objective but depends on individuals' cultural background, social context, religious convictions, and in particular the situations of the times.

The researcher interpreted critical discourses on images of older Koreans on the basis of the images of the elderly as they appear in Korean short stories. Special attention was paid to the ways in which certain elderly discourses are excluded and images of the elderly are objectified in short stories, with the result that the status quo is maintained. For this purpose, I reviewed discourses on images of old Koreans in Korean short stories in the 1930s and later. Doing research on the texts of short stories, I analysed dominant discourses characterised by a two-fold discrimination: the natural violence of ageing and death and the dehumanisation of socio-cultural exclusion. In interpreting the ways in which old people are depicted in the texts of short stories, I looked at how they come to forfeit or give up their rights as human beings. Moreover, in analysing socio-cultural structures of discrimination, I interpreted in-depth the social meanings of elderly discourses and power relations.

To sum up, while sharing traditional discourses with the co-researchers, the researcher constructed intelligible dramatic narratives for sharing. I tried to reconstruct tradition by creating a new discourse on the ageing and death of the elderly who are living in an epistemologically critical age. It is hoped that this study makes a contribution to the field of narrative therapy in this regard.

Methods employed:

- I interpreted newspaper reports on elderly suicide and suicide notes left by elderly people.
- I interpreted stories of elderly suicide that appear in Korean short stories.
- I interpreted the narratives and compare them with other narratives found in other cultural phenomena.

### **2.2.2.5 A Reflection on the Religious and Spiritual Aspects, Especially God's Presence, Understood and Experienced in a Specific Situation**

In this section, the researcher addressed the issue of how the religious life of the co-researchers can be furthered by listening to their spiritual understanding and experiences. Van Huyssteen (1997:187) says that “religious narrative leads us to see ‘through the window’ of metaphor, to the way we ought to believe.” Practical theology, I believe, should be ultimately pursued in such a way that it leads to a concrete encounter with God. An encounter with God may well engender a new perspective, insofar as human beings cannot attain to an ideal life due to their sinful nature. Accordingly, the alternative stories we ourselves make need God's transcendent intervention, because they are not self-sufficient.

In the process of interpreting the stories of the co-researchers, the research used religious questions and theological language and concerns as a window into the meanings of their lives. Insofar as counselling aims at the recovery and maturity of integrity, one needs to employ a hermeneutical tool that enables an experience of God's existence and intervention through story-telling, which provides insight into our identity. If the co-researcher is a Christian, it is more likely that he or she is able to experience God's help through story-telling. Hence it is necessary that one's personal identity be shifted into a relative identity with God. Only then would one be able to experience healing and proper recovery. The process of one's personal identity being shifted into a relative identity with God amounts to reinterpreting a story. When the word of God intervenes into the relation between researcher and co-researcher, the horizon of a story is widened, going beyond the circumference of general understanding to the stage of changing one's own life.

In order to achieve this shift, the following steps should be taken. Externalising work will provide useful resources for reinterpreting experiences in different ways. In investigating problems that influence the co-researchers, the researcher enhanced the possibility that the co-researchers overcome the problems. In that process, the negative self-identity of the co-researchers could be changed into a positive one. The researcher asked questions concerning their relative identity with God in relation to the shift of identities.



Amidst externalising work, the researcher identified the spiritual resources of the co-researchers, because they will be able to experience God's providence and gracious blessings when they have the right perspective of God. While re-authoring with the co-researchers, the researcher investigated the practical aspects of their faith. The researcher asked a number of questions in order to help them to reinterpret their negative experiences. In so doing, the co-researchers realised that they are loved by God and that they are precious in the eyes of God as well as other people. As a result, the co-researchers were able to re-author God's blessings.

Müller (2005:303) states that, "the researchers' own understanding of God's presence in a certain situation is also a valuable contribution they have to make." In addition to the positive contribution made by a research on the relation of the researcher and co-researchers with God, we must pay attention to the following negative aspects. Müller (2005:303) mentions that "the researcher is not forced to bring God into the present situation, but rather an honest effort to listen to and understand the co-researcher's religious and spiritual understanding and experiences of God's presence". Müller (1999:36) warns those who counsel as a pastor by saying that "this has led to shallow pastoral conversations which have consisted of giving a little advice or to attempts to manipulate God to get Him to do what we want Him to do." He (1999:41) says that "true pastoral work is not result-oriented, but rather wait-oriented. It does not offer answers, but facilitates questions and wait."

Methods employed:

- I tried to obtain clues as to the ways in which one can find himself or herself and become mature through listening to the stories about the experience of God.
- I tried to stimulate the spirituality of the co-researchers by obtaining spiritual clues in the process of externalising conversations, re-authoring conversations, membership reconstitution conversations, and responses of outside witnesses.

#### **2.2.2.6 A Description of Experiences Thickened Through Interdisciplinary Investigation**

In this section, attempt is made at a mutual interchange of the images of God, of which

the co-researchers are aware. While the previous section allowed them to accept God in an existential way, this section intended to perform an interdisciplinary dialogue beyond the limits of local communities, groups, and traditions. Interdisciplinarity is a method of solving problems that cannot be satisfactorily dealt with by a single study method or approach (Klein, 1990:196). Interdisciplinary work, Müller stated, is complicated and difficult (Müller, 2004:303). She summarised Midali's work by stating that, "language, reasoning strategies, contexts, and ways of accounting for human experience differ greatly between the various disciplines" (Midali, 2000:262)." It includes the conversation with other theological disciplines and with all the other fields. I had to use interdisciplinary methods in order to understand, interpret, and reflect my co-researcher's story, because no two individuals are the same, nor are their problems. Müller (2005:303) describes that the, "interdisciplinary movement is part and parcel of practical theology." I tried to critically think about the multifaceted and multi-tiered reality from the perspective of a narrative approach in the light of interdisciplinarity, asking questions that go beyond the conventional limits of traditional disciplines, and incorporate epistemological and methodological differences of each discipline.

Epistemological postfoundationalism can be integrated between my own beliefs, theology and those of various scientific disciplines. Interdisciplinary work was more effective in my conversation with my co-researchers because we treated each other equally. Van Huyssteen (1999: 264) says, "First, we should be able to enter the pluralist, interdisciplinary conversation between disciplines and research traditions with our full personal convictions intact, while at the same time reaching beyond the strict boundaries of our own intellectual context." Then, by moving beyond our own epistemic way of thinking, we can reach other "communities in cross-contextual, cross-cultural, and cross-disciplinary conversations" (van Huyssteen, 1997:4).

It bears repeating that there is a reason for interdisciplinary work. Modern anthropology has brought about the contextualisation of cultural universality. Human beings are the main concern of human science, and the core of human problems is humanity and human consciousness. These have traditionally been a matter of religion, philosophy, psychology, and literature. Yet, it is impossible these days to talk about humanity or human consciousness without regard to the results of neurophysiology, animal

morphology, artificial intelligence, and linguistics. There could be some discussion on the issues of literary aesthetics, when the problems of the aged are to be handled in the light of literature. But the same problems of the aged can be approached in a different manner, when they are viewed from the social, political, economic, medical, and religious perspective. Therefore, we need to take seriously transversal logos in order to draw on the kind of rationality that allows personal convictions and public voices to be heard in interdisciplinary conversations (van Huyssteen, 2000:430). Individual works of researchers can be re-evaluated in a creative way when interdisciplinary and cooperative works go hand in hand with egalitarian educational solidarity. Then, the researcher's structure of consciousness attains to the horizontal structure in hermeneutical terms.

Human beings exist in- context. Knowledge extends from where I stand to a context. It is here that a context informs the horizon of a perspective. In the most immediate sense, what we know is nothing but what is visible to our eyes. If we do not know the fact that it is limited and decided by the circumstantial factors around us, it cannot be rightly said that we know well what we see. Therefore, the widening of the horizon is necessary. The horizon is not fixed or determined but flexible and expansive.

Müller (2005:11) states that interdisciplinary research is complex and difficult. I agree with him on this subject. However, I would also like to say that interdisciplinary research is very interesting and beneficial. There is a special need to understand the context of elderly suicide, including social factors, religious factors, and personal psychological factors, which are formed through interaction in an environmental structure. Therefore, I believe interdisciplinary research is needed. Only then can a discourse about suicide be engendered. In highlighting the importance of human life that should be protected, I seek to propose an alternative that foregrounds interdisciplinary solidarity and communication. In order to achieve this goal, I attempted a pluralistic interdisciplinary conversion (van Huyssteen, 1997:4). As interdisciplinary movement is a part of practical theology, I listened to the narratives of others and form relationships with other disciplines. Ultimately, this led to deepening the understanding of narratives about elderly suicide.

Methods employed:

- I shared the results of the interviews with four professors in different disciplines.
- I asked them the four questions developed by Müller to acquire their opinions.
- I made use of interdisciplinary involvement, observation, and dialogue.

### **2.2.2.7 The Development of Alternative Interpretations That Point Beyond the Local Community**

The goal of practical theology lies in providing ways in which to put into practice the descriptions and interpretations of experiences. This entails the deconstruction and liberation of negative discourses (Müller, 2003:293). This study on the basis of postfoundationalist practical theology provided the co-researchers and outside witnesses with a sense of community, enhancing their solidarity and cooperation (Freedman & Combs, 1996:285). The ultimate value of an alternative discourse lies in going beyond the limits of local communities.

The researcher conducted discourses with colleagues, friends, and family members of the co-researchers. “In a very real sense, all narrative therapy is co-research.” A place of invitation was not only physically but also socially constructed and was constantly reconstructed. Community is not only a physical space but also a social space and a learning space where communication is possible. An alternative interpretation of the life of the elderly especially transcended the local community and it developed into something bigger. Diani (2003:5) pointed out that social movement’s symbolise the embeddedness of the community with strong roots to physical location and a combined system of relationships. I invited the co-researchers to work with them to create new meanings. Alternative stories as anti-practices that turn the dominant discourse also transcending local communities and enabled accountability practices (Freedman & Combs, 1996:286).

As Dean Lobovits stated, an audience is needed in order to solve the problem (Lobovits et al., 1995:255). The interdisciplinary team that I have invited to this research is already involved in alternative interpretations that transcend locational understanding. The forming of mutual engagement practice with professionals outside the church is a combination of knowledge, tools, stories, cases, and documents, and it created new

discourses which transcended location and the actuality of the creation and community of knowledge. The alternative stories from my co-researchers were exchanged interdisciplinarily in this research and served as a starting point of the in-depth consideration of elderly suicide in Korean society.

Methods employed:

- I diffused alternative narratives and created new alternative narratives.
- I generated a new interdisciplinary understanding.

### **2.2.3 Qualitative Research**

I used a qualitative research method to explore the perspectives of Korean old people regarding suicide. In this section, the meaning and characteristics of qualitative study are surveyed.

What is qualitative study? Qualitative research means comprehending the experience of others, with whom the researcher associates for certain phenomena, from his or her own perspective, and publicising the findings, as he or she understands them. The tool of qualitative research is the researcher himself, because, among other things, the experience of the researcher greatly influences the interpretations and findings involved. The researcher performs a qualitative research when he meaningfully reconstructs the information on specific problems obtained through direct experiences, observations, and interviews, and gives unique meaning to it. This unique interpretation is a way of understanding unspecific phenomena through intuition and discernment.

Qualitative research must create a flexible and circular plan. Research planning is a process of devising a concrete plan for research according to procedure. However, the researcher must beware of applying a pre-established fixed planning to research processes, because a qualitative research is always explorative and responsive to the field. Qualitative research is performed on a circular basis. And yet, the researcher should make a blueprint for the research for himself or herself. To begin with, the researcher needs to decide on the field of research according to the questions and concerns of the research and predict whom to involve in the research and how to make use of the circumstance of time and place. The most important consideration at the first stage of research planning

is whether and to what extent the plan of the researcher fits in with the purpose of the research.

Qualitative research foregrounds the subjectivity of the researcher or the research participant. Basically, qualitative research is not interested in verifying or creating hypotheses but in finding, discerning, or interpreting phenomena. Qualitative research is composed of interpretations and claims in the form of a story rather than indicators measured within an experimental or artificially created environment (Stake, 1995). The researcher gathers life stories, episodes, or experiential explanations told by research participants, with a view to getting a general picture of their life and perspective. For this reason, subjectivity in qualitative research is not considered to be a negative element that contaminates data but a most essential element involving an understanding of the reality. The researcher must perform research in a way closely related to the field by interpreting experiences and finding the most appropriate field (Stake, 2000). By means of detailed and thick descriptions, the researcher should help the reader to understand the findings of the research from the other's perspective. Ultimately, qualitative research is a type of empathy or recreation, which associates psychological atmospheres, thoughts, and feelings to the goal of the research (G. von Wright, 1971: 6).

The flexibility of the researcher who coordinates the research procedure is important in qualitative research. For example, the researcher should not be constrained by the original questions but be flexible enough to be adaptive to the new data and its analysis in order to come up with new questions. Hence, self-reflection is required of the researcher. The researcher uses his or her worldview, values, and perspective in all observations and analyses (Merriam, 1998). Since the researcher cannot get rid of his own beliefs and prejudices, he should be honestly attentive to the possibility that they can affect his research.

In qualitative analysis, interviews play a creative and dynamic role in producing diverse kinds of data. For instance, interviews enable the researcher to observe the co-researcher and investigate any underlying intentions. The researcher not only pays attention to the words uttered by the co-researcher, but s/he also provisionally interprets what is not explicitly spoken. The researcher can make use of the co-researcher's intention to avoid

certain problems, subtle emotional changes, and long-lasting silence as a hint to the research. During the interview, the researcher should be able to grasp any subtle psychological and emotional changes on the part of the co-researcher, at the same time reacting to them in an appropriate way.

Therefore, qualitative researchers should be able to move the mind and intellect of the co-researcher by means of words. Words are an interaction between people, through which dialogue participants are able to feel any changes in the other party, and the best indicator of any subjective experiences on the part of dialogue participants. Words are a very useful tool by which people make relations with each other and come to know each other. Qualitative research is a process by which not only the researcher and the research participant but also the future reader creates meaning in interactions between all research-related people (Sherman & Reid, 1994). Here interactions affect and change everyone involved.

To sum up, the final outcome of qualitative research is a total reconstruction of the data gathered by the researcher, as it is analysed by the same researcher (Mason, 1996:113). The meaning that the researcher derives from the data is not the data itself but codified data or an artwork of categorised meaning units, created through the crucible of research (Heberman & Miles, 1994).

#### **2.2.4 In-depth Interview**

This chapter explores one of the main tools of qualitative research, i.e., in-depth interviewing. It considers what the interview seeks to achieve through its findings, what it allows the researcher to do, and the advantages and disadvantages it has. Like many other research methods, in-depth interviewing has various ways in which it can be applied to research questions. Each way has its own goals and reasons. Since there are certain problems which might occur while conducting the interviews for this research, they were explored and preparations were made accordingly.

At every moment, people collect information about the subject they are interested in, from the recent sporting events to the quality of the food at the new restaurant. People gather information from many different sources. It could be done through friends and

families or the mass media including the internet. This straightforward method, though it may be enough in most cases, relies on the knowledge of other people and the honesty of the media, which might be questionable in some areas. Certain types of information cannot be gathered in a simple way but must be dug up from deeper grounds. “Many policy and academic questions require answers beyond daily experience …… to acquire such information, social scientists have worked out systematic research procedures for learning” (Rubin & Rubin, 2012:2). These research systems can largely be divided into two groups: quantification and qualification. Quantification is basically counting something and then analysing the findings statistically, whereas qualification is watching how certain deliberate changes affect the selected outcome. Depending on the topic of the research, quantification and qualification methods can be used in combination.

One of the key qualification research methods is in-depth qualitative interviewing, through which the researcher talks to people who have experience of the matter at hand. “Through such interviews, researchers explore in detail the experiences, motives, and opinions of others and learn to see the world from perspectives other than their own” (Rubin & Rubin, 2012:3). Researchers are able to conduct studies about issues they are not directly involved in or connected with. Male researchers can conduct research about becoming a mother and the affect childbearing has on their lives. In-depth interviewing allows researchers to reconstruct events that they have not experienced, such as illegal activities or occupations that are socially frowned upon. Sometimes through the interview, stereotypes and prejudices can be broken down, long-held assumptions challenged, and ineffective policies changed.

When an in-depth interview is conducted over a period of time, it helps to portray ongoing social processes, such as raising a child or a day of the specific worker. Furthermore, an interview can be carried out over a long period of time by repeatedly conducting the interview. Changes of a person’s personal or communal life can be recorded by means of in-depth interviewing. A group of new mothers can be interviewed for their experiences of becoming a mother, as they portray the difficulties they might have experienced and how their identities have been affected by the social and cultural expectations of them as mothers (Miller, 2005).



“In-depth interviewing allows the researcher to explore complex, contradictory, or counterintuitive matters” (Rubin & Rubin, 2012:4). It shows people’s hidden motives and opinions. “Qualitative interviewers examine the complexity of the real world by exploring multiple perspectives toward an issue” (Rubin & Rubin, 2012:4). This makes in-depth interviewing an appropriate tool for handling sensitive and/or personal topics or morally ambiguous choices people have made. It might be a tool to be used for exploring incest, abortion, child abandonment, or domestic violence, and illegal behaviour.

In-depth interviewing seeks rich and detailed information and examples and stories of experiences. Questions are open-ended and researchers do not put the interviewee into a category so the interviewee can respond in any way possible. The questions are not fixed so the researcher can change the questions in accord with the interview as it continues. Within these similarities, there are a variety of interviews, such as focus groups, internet interviews, and semi- structured and unstructured interviews.

There are variables that can be changed, including the role of the researcher, the length of the interview, the number of people interviewed at the same time, how well the interviewee and the interviewer are acquainted with each other, etc. All different types of interviews have their own advantages and disadvantages. For example, in the case of focus groups, interviewees are allowed to discuss their opinions with each other, which means that the researcher can watch how the conversation take places and their opinions grow and change. However, it can be difficult to bring out personal information from the interviewees as they are all working in a group and some might be reluctant to share their truthful opinions in front of people they do not know very well. “Focus groups are usually scheduled for a limited period of time” (Rubin & Rubin, 2012:30). As the end approaches, the researcher might need to rush the group to reach a conclusion.

Compared to ordinary conversations, in-depth interview centres on the research question and pursues it in-depth. “In ordinary conversations, people rarely spend much time; much less hold multiple conversations, to ascertain how people understand a particular concept” (Rubin & Rubin, 2012:6). Or the research question can focus on a certain event and the process of that event. Researchers try to keep the interview flowing on the topic

at hand, unlike regular conversations where the topic can move from this to that. For this purpose, they prepare questions and follow-up questions to ask, which are normally open-ended and allow the interviewee to answer in any way they want. Unlike everyday conversations, interviews are normally conducted with strangers; the interviewee and the interviewer normally meet for the first time just for the research. It is important for the relationship between the interviewee and the interviewer to develop into a trusting personal relationship, especially if the research question is focused on a sensitive or personal topic. “Since conversations are often recorded, trust is required that the researcher will not make public what could be embarrassing or harmful to the interviewee” (Rubin & Rubin, 2012:6).

Since I was interviewing elderly people, there were many problems that occurred that I needed to address before starting the interview. I had to make sure that the place of interview is quiet enough, because many elderly interviewees have hearing problems. It is common for elderly interviewees not to remember exactly when or in what order events took place. Therefore, I used pictures and diaries with dates. In addition, “older people, especially those living in institutional settings, may be lonely or bored, may be delighted to have someone pay attention to them, and may talk overly long without tight focus” (Rubin & Rubin, 2012:174). I scheduled the interviews to be long enough, but I had to arrange additional interviews, where necessary, in consideration of the amount of information gathered.

In-depth interviewing is a major method of qualitative research and it allows freedom to both the interviewee and the interviewer. It gives room for the interviewer to ask personal questions. It also gives power to the interviewees, as they can answer questions in the way they desire and even refuse to answer certain questions. Through in-depth interviewing, accurate narratives can be drawn of the matter at hand, but the relationship between the interviewer and the interviewee needs to be established first, in order to receive detailed answers. As my research dealt with a sensitive and personal issue, in-depth interviewing was very useful. To be able to find enough information I had to maintain a truthful and trusting relationship with the interviewees. Building up this relationship was the key to the quality of the information I gathered from the in-depth interviews. As an interview was conducted over a period of time, it was possible to record

any meaningful changes with social or cultural connotations. However, it was necessary to conduct interviews repeatedly to gain all the missing information from the interviewee.

### **2.2.5 Pastoral Care**

Pastoral care is a church ministry in which a pastor, who constructs his life on an eschatological horizon or who wraps himself in the core values and meanings embedded in the source materials of the traditional Christian narratives (Gerkin, 1991:15), takes care of the souls of the congregation. In this sense, pastoral care means leading believers to look at human beings and their life stories within the framework intended and oriented by God (Gerkin, 1986:49), through the language system of overarching narrative (Gerkin, 1986:48) or grounding narrative (Gerkin, 1986:51), provided by the Bible. According to narrative epistemology, pastoral care means taking care of those who need caring, and this caretaking is not a mere care but an all-round care. In the end, to care is to help others to retrieve their sound personality and at the same time grow mature and advance self-realisation in a creative way. Care is one of God's attributes. Insofar as God takes care of all churches and all believers, pastoral care can be understood as part of God's works through pastors. Hence, pastoral care for every believer is basically God's ministry.

William Clebsch and Charles Jaekle speak of four functions of pastoral care (William Clebsch·Charles Jaekle, 1987:72). The first function of pastoral care is healing. One of the goals of pastoral care is to heal the whole person and in so doing help him or her to overcome his or her wounds and become a better person. The second function of pastoral care is sustaining. Sustaining means comforting, supporting, and helping a person in trouble so that he or she may not incur further trouble. The third function of pastoral care is guiding. Guiding presupposes that wisdom plays a role in pastor care, as it sheds light on the fundamental meaning and orientation of life. The fourth function of pastoral care is reconciling. Reconciling means helping to recover the broken relationships between humans or between a person and God by means of forgiveness and discipline. Howard Clinebell adds another function of pastoral care, nurturing, to these four functions suggested by Clebsch and Jaekle (Howard Clinebell, 1987:72). The aim of nurturing is to enable a person to realise and develop God-given talents in the midst of sufferings in

one's life.

In order to effectively accomplish the above-mentioned four functions of pastoral care, a pastor should be a clinically informed practitioner (John Patton, 1983:18), create empathetic and accountable personal relationships (John Patton, 1993:40), have a communal, contextual perspective rather than an one-on-one and problem-solving attitude (John Patton, 1986:137), and ultimately wait beside clients, showing empathy and acceptance, until they realise that they are not in a position to forgive anyone (John Patton, 1985:169).

Patton believes that the narrative approach is required for the accomplishment of these four functions of pastoral care. According to Patton, pastoral care involves telling a story, sharing emotions, and giving meaning. He suggests that interpretation plays a role in incorporating individual life events into one story. However, since meanings are not fixed but metaphoric or symbolic, people come to know the way in which they look at the reality by rethinking their intended meanings in the process of speaking, and elicit profound and deep meanings from the individual and communal life by constructing a new perspective (John Patton, 1983:218). He argues that new meanings are produced when a story is changed as it is shared and interpreted. Here we must make sure that it is neither a pastor nor a counsellor that practically solves all problems. We must encourage and help the client himself or herself to become an expert therapist. Only then, as Müller (2005) argues, can the client become an expert. According to Gerkin, humans become interpreters as they are involved in the process of interpreting, which is possible because humans are basically meaning makers. Gerkin posits a hermeneutical notion of the self as interpreter of its own experiences (Gerkin, 1984:80). When a story changes, a person changes, and when a person changes, a story changes, opening the door for a new road (Gerkin, 1984: 28). Ultimately, the perfect intention of pastoral care to lead the client to the future creative possibilities is revealed when a fusion of horizons happens as the story of the client and the Christian story of the counsellor converge (Gerkin, 1986:54).

It is in old age that people experience a variety of crises most severely in life. Old people become frustrated and emotionally unstable as they undergo retirement, bereavement and deteriorating health. Old people may be able to overcome these crises with the aid of

family members or friends. However, because of the modernisation of Korean society and the trend toward the nuclear family, traditional support groups do not seem to play a role any longer in intervening in those crises. As a result, old people are driven into a dead-end. Old people consider suicide an option in search of an escape from a life of frustration. This trend is a serious problem in Korean society. First and foremost, old people who feel a suicidal urge need to be introduced to a new understanding of life. As Gerkin points out, while it is true that an event leads to a crisis, what is more important is one's perspective or interpretive angle by which one interprets that event (Gerkin, 1979:41). According to Gerkin, in order to comprehend one's interpretive angle, we need to look at an event from a complex point of view, subsuming individual psychology, social problems, and cultural influences; most importantly, we should pay attention to the system of meanings and dynamic powers that form one's experiences, i.e., the circulation between individual and community and between meanings and powers (Gerkin, 1979:42).

In the final analysis, pastoral care is to incorporate one's interpretation of life and of life soul into one world (Gerkin, 1984:97). Gerkin suggests three hermeneutic strategies for moving from one's own life to a life of soul. The first strategy is to look at how the language of power and the language of meaning overlap with and influence each other in three important dimensions of a life of soul—self/ego dimension, social contextual dimension, and religious and cultural dimension. Second, when a person interprets his or her experiences, the level of time in understanding must be extended to the level of eternal time, i.e., eschatological time, beyond biological/individual time and social time. Third, one's own interpretation is in the end expressed in a story, and this transit is seen in the quality of the story or narrative (Gerkin, 1984:110-112). Thus, seen from a narrative perspective, pastoral care starts with the hermeneutical assumption that a person as a living human and the interpreter of himself or herself.

Although imagination and a change of attitude may not be realities that are concretely realised, they can still change the content and direction of the client's story of self. The change of a person is tantamount to the change of his or her story. From the perspective of narrative theology, the goal of pastoral care is, "the facilitation of the transformation of life" (Gerkin, 1984:146). Therefore, from the perspective of narrative, pastoral care

provides experiences with a language of faith and creates new meanings through a fusion of horizons between religious context and socio-cultural context, in so doing satisfying a life of soul, with a view to enhancing hermeneutical, eschatological hopes for the kingdom of God.

### 3. Perspectives on Elderly Suicide in Korean Short and Medium-length Novels

#### 3.1 Introduction: Literary Texts

In *Intimations of Immortality*, Wordsworth describes old age as an unavoidable declining winter that comes after the fantastical childhood full of dreams. Yet, he ends the poem by stating that in old age man can still find hope, strength, and blessing. The past may be long gone but the benefits from it will never leave us (1807:349). Likewise, literature can help to understand human identity in a way that psychology cannot. The narrative approach is deeply connected with literature, which handles narratives in a specific way. The narrative approach can be seen as exploring the life story of the client, and reconstructing the negative story of problems into a positive story.

From this perspective, novels that deal with elderly suicide are a good way of exploring the lives of elderly people, who have lost the "fantastic light" and "glory and dream." We will look at nineteen novels dealing with elderly suicide with the following questions: What is the perspective of the author in dealing with elderly suicide? How is the problem of elderly suicide reconstructed into a mature story of life?

There are just a few studies on the reasons for and socio-cultural meanings of suicide on the basis of Korean Literature (Shin, Young Mi, 2009; Lee, Young-Ah, 2012; Hwang, Hye-Jin, 2012). Because there seems to be no study on the way in which elderly suicide is dealt with in Korean short novels, this study may well be the first one. As we discuss elderly suicide handled in Korean short novels, it will be made clear that suicide is not detached from us but related to us and our lives. This leads to a constructive interest in suicide, which will enable us to approach those at risk for suicide in a positive way.

There are nineteen Korean short novels that deal with elderly suicide: three from the 1920s to the 1960s, four in the 1970s, four in the 1980s, two in the 1990s, and two thereafter.

### 3.2 Short and Medium-length Novels That Deal with Elderly Suicide from the 1920s to the 1960s

<Table 2> Short and Medium-length Novels that Deal with Elderly Suicide from the 1920s to the 1960s

#	Title	Year	Writer	Characters Who Commit Suicide/Age	Motive for Suicide	Suicide Method	Meaning of the Novel	Reactions of Acquaintances
1	<i>A Real Estate Agency</i>	1937	Lee Tae-Joon	Ahn Choshi/ 60	Loss of Self-Respect after Alienated from His Daughter	Drugs	Critique of the Younger Generation and the Alienation of the Older Generation in a Changing World	Daughter Conceals the Cause of Death and Conducts a Funeral. Friends Do not Attend the Funeral, Disappointed by her Dual Personality,
2	<i>An Old Potter</i>	1944	Hwang Soon-Won	Old Mr. Song	Betrayal by His Wife and Student	Furnace	The Artisan Spirit That Faces the Reality of Betrayal with Death	Not Mentioned
3	<i>A Stationery Seller</i>	1955	Hwang Soon-Won	Old Mr. Seo/ 70	Frustration due to Loss of Hope	Disease	The Fact that People are more Frustrated by Lack of Personal Fellowship than by Misfortunes due to External Circumstances	Not Mentioned

As Table 2 shows, there are three short and medium-length novels that deal with elderly suicide from the 1920s to the 1960s: *A Real Estate Agency*, *An Old Potter*, and *A Stationery Seller*. Let us look at *A Real Estate Agency*. Three elderly friends are gathered at a real estate agency. Ahn Choshi, a learned 60-year-old person who can read Chinese writing, is so poor that he cannot afford a dress shirt for Choosok (the Korean Thanksgiving Day), though he once made a fortune by investing in real estate. Dependent on his daughter who is a dancer, he passes his days at the real estate agency. Seo Chameui (in a government post) was a soldier when young, but he now runs the agency and feels the sorrows of life. He is the one who first found out about the death of Ahn Choshi and



gave his daughter some information on funeral procedures. Park Hee-Wan is a regular visitor to the agency, as he prepares for scrivenerly after his land speculation failed. Ahn Kyung-Wha, the daughter of Ahn Choshi, is a selfish, pretentious ballerina who studied abroad.

The motive for suicide in *A Real Estate Agency* is Ahn Choshi's loss of self-respect when his daughter disregarded him. Ahn Choshi suffered several business failures, and he is now 60 years old. He is so poor that he has to be financially dependent on his daughter (Ahn Kyung-Wha), who is famous as a dancer. Although he always dreams of a comeback, he finally falls victim to a fraud. Not able to overcome his frustrations and having no more dreams, he killed himself by taking poison. On the surface, it seems that he committed suicide because of the fraud. Yet, his uncomfortable relations with his daughter seem to be the underlying reason for his suicide. This is indicated by the statement he made concerning his daughter who disregarded him in making investments (73): "How can riches undermine filial obligations so easily?" Having lost self-respect after alienation from his daughter, he committed suicide by taking poisonous drugs at the real estate agency a few days before *Chooseok*.

The suicide method Ahn Choshi chooses in *A Real Estate Agency* is to take poison.

"What ....."

(.....) Looking around, he found a vial or something like that. It took a while before Seo Chameui found out that it was a tragedy. There was blood on his lips, and his face was grey. There blew a shady and dampish wind as in a cellar (74).

*A Real Estate Agency* depicts contrasting reactions on the part of Ahn Choshi's acquaintances to his suicide. His daughter does not want her father's suicide to be divulged in the fear that it might defame her honour.

"We should report to the government office."

"No, don't bother," Ahn Choshi's daughter opposed.

"Don't bother?"

“My ……”

“My what?”

“My honor ……” She implored.

“Honor? No way. How could a person who is concerned about honor let her father die like that?”

“……”

Ahn Kyung-Wha fell down and cried again. Then, she grabbed Seo Chameui’s legs who was about to leave, saying,

“Save my life.”

She repeated several times (75).

As the above excerpt shows, Ahn Choshi’s daughter wanted to hide her father’s suicide. Then Seo Chameui had her conduct a decent funeral using the death benefit.

In contrast to Ahn Kyung-Wha, Ahn Choshi’s friends, Seo Chameui and Park Hee-Wahn deplore his death and criticise her for neglecting her father. Seo Chameui offers incense to the deceased, saying,

“Do you recognize me? It’s me, Seo Chameui. Huh …… Good for you. You would never enjoy this kind of luxury, if you were alive. You don’t have to worry about the arms of your glasses. Sure …… ” (77).

Thus he deplores the death of his friend. These friends of Ahn Choshi hate the hypocritical acts of his daughter to such an extent that they do not go to the cemetery but to a tavern.

The meaning of this work lies in problematising the alienation and loss of patriarchal authority of the older generation in a changing world and criticising the younger generation. The suicide of Ahn Choshi in a real estate agency in the suburbs of Seoul may symbolise the hopeless lives of the alienated elderly living in the 1930s. The real reason why Ahn Choshi committed suicide is because he lost his self-respect as his family

collapsed and his daughter disregarded him, not because he was frustrated by his failures in real estate investment.

Now let us look at *An Old Potter* in Table 2-2. Three main characters appear in this work. Old Mr. Song is a potter who makes jars in a kiln. He is not only suffering from hunger and a disease but he was also betrayed by his wife. An elderly lady neighbour, who owns a cherry tree, takes good care of this father and son and encourages old Mr. Song to allow his son to be adopted into a rich family. His seven-year-old son, Dang-Son, is adopted into another family because of his poverty.

The motive for suicide in *An Old Potter* is the artisan spirit that faces the reality of betrayal with death. Old Mr. Song makes jars in a kiln for a living. Unfortunately, he is betrayed by his wife and assistant; they fell in love with each other and eloped. In addition to being cheated, he suffers from hunger and a disease. Then, an elderly lady neighbour suggests to him that he should have his seven-year-old son, named Dang-Son, adopted into another family. He does his utmost to make jars in order to survive the winter. But his jars all broke. Despairing at this, he asks the old lady to tell his son that he is dead and to make arrangements for his adoption. After sending his son, he managed to creep into the kiln which is still extremely hot and dies there as if to replace broken jars.

The suicide method old Mr. Song chooses in *An Old Potter* is to face death in an upright position within the kiln. He intentionally throws himself into the kiln which is still hot and resolutely faces death. In his last moments, he simply wishes that he had just one jar to send to his son.

The meaning of this work lies in dramatically showing one's resolute will to face the reality of betrayal with death. It is a very gloomy story in that it deals with diseases, hatred for one's wife and assistant, and persistent poverty, which forces old Mr. Song to allow his son to be adopted into another family. However, he never despairs, as is indicated by the depiction of his eyes: "strangely glittering eyes." His eyes were strangely glittering as his jars were breaking in the kiln.

But old Mr. Song stood up and began to creep toward the kiln ..... He was

looking for something, as his eyes were strangely glittering in darkness. It seemed as if he were emanating his last energy. Then, he suddenly stopped in the path of the bright late-autumn sunshine coming through the open window, as if he had found that which he was looking for. There were scattered the fragments of his jars (312-313).

As the above-cited passage shows, old Mr. Song looks for something in the dark kiln with his strangely glittering eyes and finally recognises the fragments of his jars in the bright late-autumn sunshine. Then, he breathes his last. Thus he shows a resolute will to face the reality of betrayal with death.

Now let us look at *A Stationery Seller* in Table 2-3. There are three main characters in this literary work. Old Mr. Seo is an itinerant stationery seller. He is a 70-year-old itinerant stationery seller with post-polio symptoms. An elderly woman living in Set-Gol village offers him lodging for one night. She is kind enough to make a pair of Korean traditional socks for him in preparation for his son's wedding. She is looking forward to his son's return from the war. At the age of 23, his son was drafted into the Japanese army. The chief of Set-Gol village, an old customer of old Mr. Seo, shows kind hospitality to him and conducts his-funeral when he dies.

The motive for suicide in *A Stationery Seller* is a frustrated goal and loss of hope. Actually old Mr. Seo learned painting and calligraphic work from his father, but he did not show any talent or advance. When his father died, he became a stationery seller. However, his life was a hard one, as the nation became more westernised. Many village schools were closed and fewer people bought the kind of stationery that he was selling. The chief of Set-Gol village was one of the customers who often still bought his merchandise. He used to return this favour by drawing a picture and writing some words for him. But apparently they were not good enough (126).

On a certain autumn day after independence, the elderly woman makes a Korean traditional topcoat and a pair of socks for old Mr. Seo who is soaked with rain. This is the first time in his life when he was kindly welcomed by anyone. Whenever he went through this village, he used to ask villagers about her. Just a couple days before the

Korean War broke out, old Mr. Seo stopped by the chief's and drew a picture of live apricots, which is different from the previous pictures. While he was going to the house of the elderly woman to give her the picture, the Korean War broke out. By the time he arrived there, the village had already become a wasteland because of massive bombing. He just flopped down.

On a sunny spring day, the chief found the dead body of an old man lying on a hill. It was that of old Mr. Seo. His backpack contained a new pair of Korean traditional socks, a picture of apricots, and a note asking to be buried with the socks on.

As mentioned above, old Mr. Seo fulfilled his ambition to draw a good picture. Yet, he could not give the picture to the woman who had shown him affection, since her house turned to ruins. As his goal in life disappeared, he lost all hope and died in frustration.

The suicide method chosen by old Mr. Seo is not specified in *A Stationery Seller*. The note in his backpack, however, lets readers infer that he committed suicide.

He made people open his backpack …… There were some money and a brand-new pair of Korean traditional socks. There was also a note saying, “Please use this money to bury me. Please put these socks on me” …… There was also found a picture of apricots which he had drawn at the chief's house and with which he had run outside as if mad (133).

The meaning of this work lies in showing the importance of affectionate fellowship in our lives. Old Mr. Seo has spent a gloomy life for seventy years as he experienced Korea's westernisation, Japanese colonialism, independence and, the Korean War. Actually he was born in the late Chosun period, when he could become a classical scholar by learning to draw and write. But as the nation became westernised, he had to live a hard life selling old-school stationery. When his only hope and desire in life to present a drawing to the woman he first loved disappeared, he chose to die in frustration.

To sum up, *A Realtor Agency* in Table 2-1 deals with an intergenerational conflict due to

the arrival of western capitalism. Ahn Choshi in this work is so poor that he cannot even fix the arms of his glasses, as opposed to his rich daughter who is a ballerina. He is literally penniless, wears worn-out summer clothes until winter. And he is disregarded by his daughter. The author problematises the alienation of the older generation due to their loss of patriarchal authority and criticises the younger generation.

*A Stationery Seller* in Table 2-3 depicts an old person who commits suicide deals with the introduction of a new education system due to the arrival of western capitalism and the impoverishment of old people because of new occupations not for old people but for young people. Until the age of seventy, old Mr. Seo lives as an itinerant stationery seller, though old-school stationery is no more in need as the nation witnesses westernisation and village schools disappear. He travels nationwide, limping and wearing a backpack, but in the end he commits suicide in poverty.

Likewise, in *An Old Potter* of Table 2-2, harsh realities make old Mr. Song to give his only son up for adoption because of financial difficulties. These three novels all depict impoverished old people who lived in a period of social transition, experiencing intergenerational conflicts due to the arrival of western capitalism, the collapse of traditional ethics, etc. (Park Huh-Shik, 1999:106). The characters who commit suicide are all male.

### 3.3 Short and Medium-length Novels That Deal with Elderly Suicide in the 1970s

<Table 3> Short and Medium-length Novels That Deal with Elderly Suicide in the 1970s

#	Title	Year	Writer	Characters Who Commit Suicide	Motive for Suicide	Suicide Method	Meaning of the Novel	Reactions of Acquaintances
1	<i>Blue Smile</i>	1973	Choi Sang-Kyu	Father	Bankruptcy and Alienation	Drugs	One Man's Outcry that Misses the Timing	Son Regrets His Acts and Sobs over His Father's Death

2	<i>Jung Haak-Joon</i>	1977	Lee Byung-Joo	Jung Haak-Joon	Opposition to Son's Marriage	Fasting	Manifestation of Paternal Love and Keeping One's Integrity	Friends Sympathize with His Suicide
3	<i>Uncle Suni</i>	1978	Hyun Ki-Young	Uncle Suni	Failure to Overcome the Trauma Inflicted by Government Power	Drugs	Public Discussion about Hidden Historical Events	Sympathize with the Long-standing Grievances that Uncle Suni Cherished
4	<i>Death of Old Mr. Park</i>	1979	Kim Young-Jin	Old Mr. Park	Frustration due to Alienation and Neglect within the Family	Drugs	A Suggestion How to Live a Dignified Elderly Life	At First Perplexed, They Grieve the Death of Old Mr. Park after Knowing the Inside Story.

As Table 3 shows, there are four short or medium-length novels that deal with elderly suicide in the 1970s: *Blue Smile*, *Jung Haak-Joon*, *Uncle Suni*, and *Death of Old Mr. Park*. Let us look at *Blue Smile* in Table 3-1. Four main characters appear in this work. There is a 60-year-old father, who is an obstinate stingy widower. His only son has lived apart from him since he was a child, developing an independent character. As a result, he feels uncomfortable with his father and rarely opens his heart to his father. In contrast, his wife is so submissive to the extended family system to such an extent that she wants to live with her father-in-law.

The motive for suicide in *Blue Smile* is simply money. The father loves money so much that he regards his son and wife as a barrier to his life. However, he undergoes bankruptcy through a failed investment. He has no place to go. He finally contacts his only son, but his self-esteem prevents him from opening his heart to his son and instead he hurts his son's feelings. Not knowing what has happened to his father, his son is hurt by his father's inhumane attitude and turns his back on him. That night, the son hears from his father's manager about what happened to his father. The next day he pays a visit to his father, but he finds the dead body of his father, which is bluish. There appears a bitter, blue smile on the face of his father who loved money so much.

The son reacts to his father's suicide in *Blue Smile* by regretting and sobbing. Finding his father's "lifetime account book" (305) in which he sees zero balance, he recalls his father laughing, speaking to himself, "What a correct divine punishment." His father's blue smile is not a simple smile (303) but a nuanced revelation of his life's vanity and bitterness. In front of his father's death, he sobs and regrets having rejected his father's hand, which was held out just once in his life.

The meaning of *Blue Smile* lies in emphasising the son's regrets losing a chance to help his father, whose powerful yet distorted life prevented communication within the family. There is a Korean saying that there is neither spring in which barley does not ripen nor June in which rice does not ripen. There is always a good time and season for anything. The father missed a good time to take care of his family because of his love for money. Later on, he also wasted an opportunity to tell his son about his bankruptcy because of his self-respect. What about his son? He lost a chance to listen to his father when he asked him to check out his bank account, because he misunderstood the reason why his father asked for help once and for all. In other words, he lost a chance to save his father's life. They have in common the fact that they lost a good time in critical moments. This is symbolised by the blue smile on the face of the dead body of the father. Thus *Blue Smile* speaks of the vanity and bitterness of life, comparable to a bitter cup.

In *Jung Haak-Joon* in Table 3-3, four main characters appear in this literary work. When young, Jung Haak-Joon took part in the independence movement against Japanese colonialism, he was arrested and tortured by investigator Park Pal-Do to such an extent that he became crippled. Until he was seventy years old, he could not take care of his family because he himself had to be dependent on others. His nickname is "Octopus," which means that he has no guts and he is such a feeble man. But when he hears that his son is going to get married, he fasts four days and dies. Although "I" was nine years younger than him, we were on speaking terms with each other, and I often assisted him financially. "I" understand why he committed suicide. Jung Joon-HO, his son, is in his late twenties. He is seeing Park Soon-Hyun, the daughter of investigator Park Pal-Do who tortured his father during Japanese colonialism, and he finally tells his father that he wants to marry her. Not understanding why his father objects to his marriage by fasting, he asks for help from "Me" and Kim Dong-Ha, a friend of his father's. Kim Dong-Ha is



his father's close friend from middle school days. He and "I" deeply mourn Jung Haak-Joon's suicide.

The motive for suicide in *Jung Haak Joon* is the manifestation of paternal love and keeping one's integrity. Under Japanese colonialism, Jung Haak-Joon was expelled from school because he was considered a leader in the Kwang-Joo Student Movement, but he graduated from a school in Tokyo. He fought for the independence of Korea from Japan in coalition with some independence activists in China. While he was staying in Korea for a while, he was arrested by investigator Park Pal-Do and tortured in a detention room located in the basement of the police department for three years. When he was released after Korean independence from Japan (August 15, 1945), he was almost insane.

In contrast, Park Pal-Do who was a cat's paw of the Japanese police, was not convicted of any unpatriotic acts but swam with the tide to such an extent that he not only became a millionaire but he was also respected by others as a man of good character. However, he does not remember the name of Jung Haak-Joon, who was forced to change his name to a Japanese name, "Nobuhara," and does not recognise the fact that he will be the father-in-law of his would-be son-in-law, Jung Joon-Ho.

Knowing that his son wants to marry the daughter of Park Pal-Do, Jung Haak-Joon shows a strong opposition by beginning to fast, which is "his only, last stubborn resort" (238). Not knowing anything, his son visits his friends and asks for intervention. Kim Dong-Han and "I" accept his request and visit his father, only to find his father dying covered with a straw mat on the warm spot of the room. The next day, Jung Haak-Joon dies. Writing a death certificate, a doctor informs us that he was not only fasting for four days but he has been suffering from malnutrition for a long time. His second wife was also suffering oedema. This is the last words of Jung Haak-Joon.

Life seems so trivial. Is life worthy of living? Life is so empty. I might sound tear-jerking. My only life was to live at least one day longer than Park Pal-Do, though I was so badly beaten by him. That would be my revenge on him. That hope is gone. So is the thought (238).

As the excerpt shows, Jung Haak-Joon's only hope in his vain life was to live longer than Park Pal-Do. As his son insisted on marrying the daughter of Park Pal-Do, he decided to fast.

The suicide method chose by Jung Haak-Joon is fasting. The reason why he chose this method is as follows:

It is too cold to dive into the Han River. I have no guts to jump off a high building. It is disgusting to drink poison. So I will fast as of today. In two weeks or three weeks at the latest, everything will come to a settlement (224).

Let us look at how Jung Haak-Joon's acquaintances react to his suicide. Not understanding why his father fasts to die, his son, Jung Joon-Ho rebukes his father, saying,

Father, are you making fun of me? What have you done for me so far? I grew up in my grandmother's house until I graduated from high school. I got the scholarships throughout my college. I got a job on my own. Actually you paid my tuition for one semester. I will pay it back to you. But I don't understand why you are doing this. You know, I chose my spouse very carefully. Is her family inferior to ours? Is Mr. Park Pal-Do inferior to you? Why are you opposing this marriage? (224)

In contrast, knowing the real reason why Jung Haak-Joon fasted in order to die, "I" laments over his death as follows:

At that time, I witnessed another tragic death. He was not a celebrity like Mr. Shim Yeon-Sub or Mr. Kim Byung-Yule, whose deaths newspaper reported. However, his death was also a desperate death. His death was all the more deplorable, because it was just one of the numerous nameless deaths that occurred on a daily basis (218).

As indicated above, "I" considers the death that he has chosen for his son's sake as a desperate one. Insofar as "I" views his death from a positive point of view, I make up my

mind not to feel sorry for his death.

The significance of *Jung Haak-Joon* is as follows. When he comes to know that his son wants to get married to the daughter of his foe, the hero who feels guilty about his son, for whom he has not been a good father so far, commits suicide for his son's sake. His suicide is also a symbol of his unbending integrity, which is intended to condemn the person who tortured him too badly for such a long period of time. The author sympathises with his suicide, as he writes as follows:

I thought that he had done well to die. I suspected that his suicide was the best thing he had done in his life. I decided not to feel sorry for the death of Jung Haak-Joon. Human beings should not excessively grieve about death. Everyone is supposed to cope with his or her own death (242).

*Uncle Suni* in Table 3-3 has two major characters that appear in this work. Though far away from Jeju Island, I (narrator) am recording the hidden facts of the Jeju 4.3 Incident. Uncle Suni (In Jeju Island, people used to call a distant kin, male or female, "uncle," in so doing maintaining intimate fellowships) is actually a woman, who survived the incident in 1949 before the Korean War. Then she experienced trauma for thirty years and finally commits suicide.

The motive for suicide in *Uncle Suni* is the failure of one innocent woman to overcome the trauma inflicted by government power. She is an aged woman suffering from extreme neurasthenia. She is emotionally unstable and is on bad terms with others. Since she was mentally damaged by the burning of her village in Jeju Island in 1949, she avoids soldiers, police officers, and especially police stations. In those days, soldiers were commanded to shoot to death all people in the operation area. The command came from the superior authorities, who used to stigmatise as communists the inhabitants of Jeju Island, where the 4.3 Incident and the 5.10 Election Incident happened. They burned houses and killed six hundred villagers in a sunken field. She passed out just before the execution. She woke up under several layers of dead bodies. She is the only survivor. After experiencing a mass slaughter, she suffers from neurasthenia and auditory hallucination, feeling guilty that she is the only survivor, and in particular fighting off the

dark shadows floating in her head. In fact, she still lives under the influence of that day, not overcoming the shock for thirty years. As her neurasthenia and mysophobia become worse, Uncle Suni finally goes to the field of slaughter and commits suicide there.

A thirty-year life of long-suffering may well be endurable to some people, but not to Uncle Suni. She can never get out of the sunken field, in which white bones and bullets are still found. Perhaps as a last resort, she comes to my house in Seoul, not informing her daughter, in order to leave behind all the bad memories of the sunken field, which haunts her so persistently.

Yet, the sunken field in which her brothers and sisters were buried is your destiny. You found your head thrown toward the field, as if dragged by a ghost living in a deep swamp. Yes, your death did not happen one month ago, but happened today, as a bullet that came out of an old gun in the sunken field thirty years ago has just pierced through your chest after the thirty-year suspension of execution (156).

As this excerpt shows, Uncle Suni's suicide is due to a long-lasting memory. Every time she worked and dug up bones in the field, which could have been her own, Uncle Suni re-experienced the past event. Though she is physically alive, she is practically dead.

Uncle Suni decides to commit suicide in a very symbolic place, which is the sunken field she owns. This is the place of slaughter where soldiers killed innocent villagers thirty years ago. Her two daughters were also shot to death and buried there.

The suicide method Uncle Suni chooses in the sunken field is drinking poison.

She was wearing a brown, not white, Korean traditional overcoat and a warm rabbit fur muffler. She was lying as if she were sleeping. There were scattered some leftover cyanide pills, which are originally used for hunting pheasants, around her head ..... It was eight days ago that she was found dead (112).

Hearing about her suicide, her acquaintances say that actually she was dead thirty years ago.

“Alas, that madam finally died in the field.”

As I heard seniors say so, I was possessed with the strange illusion that Uncle Suni did not die one month and a half ago but thirty years ago on that day in that field …… A painful memory thirty years ago may have been forgettable or endurable to some people, but not to the villagers. On the contrary, they tried to bear it in mind as they kept talking about it at memorial rites for the dead (125).

The meaning of *Uncle Suni* lies in foregrounding the hidden historical event by reporting the brutality and after effect of the Jeju 4.3 Incident via a realism technique. The author helped to recall the slaughter of the innocent suffering people by publishing the novel in 1978, which was the last period of the Yushin regime. This novel encountered sanctions and was once banned. The suicide of Uncle Suni in this novel demonstrates that a person is essentially influenced by the social circumstances in which he or she is positioned or by past events, no matter how sound his or her sense of self may be.

In the novel *The Death of Old Mr. Park* in Table 3-4, there are two main characters. Old Mr. Park is a disabled man, who hopes that his children will regret their wrongdoings and perform their filial duties. As his expectation is frustrated, he commits suicide. Old Mr. Ahn thought that he is a very close friend of old Mr. Park. But when old Mr. Park commits suicide without giving him any hint of his suicide, he is disappointed and feels sorry for him.

The motive for suicide in *The Death of Old Mr. Park* is the hero's disappointment at the failure of his children to perform filial duties towards him. Old Mr. Park is 75 years old and walks on crutches because his foot was cut off at a construction site when he was young. Nevertheless, he walks faster than those without disabilities and does not care about his physical condition. He raised six children but he has no place in which to dwell comfortably. He used to live with his first-born son, but he was expelled by his daughter-in-law. He lived with other sons as well, and then finally he moved to his youngest son. One day he gets drunk and loses his precious crutches. When he keeps asking his sons to buy him a new pair of crutches, they all refuse. As his friends come to know that he

cannot come to the silver hall without crutches, they chip in and buy him a new pair of crutches. When he comes to his third son on those crutches to get an allowance, he overhears shocking news from his daughter-in-law. “If those damned old men had bought something for themselves with that money instead of buying him a new pair of crutches, he could no longer visit us. He so bothers us ……” (218). It is then he realises that he was expecting in vain that his children would eventually regret their wrongdoings and perform their filial duties, he commits suicide; he comes to know the real reason why they refused to buy him a new pair of crutches.

The suicide method that the hero chooses in this novel is to drink poison. Old Mr. Park says, “We should live long. As we get older, we need a stronger attachment to life. Yes, that is indeed true.” He had a strong attachment to life. But he somehow gave up his life and drank poison as if it were pop soda. It was old Mr. Ahn, rather than him, who should have drunk poison.

His friends are extremely surprised at the suicide of old Mr. Park. He used to be a cheerful and positive man. He was voluble and thus was on good terms with many other people. Not only was he kind to others but he also behaved seriously and prudently. As he practised yoga in order to stay healthy, he used to comfort his friends at the silver hall, saying that even an ugly and unsightly life is better than death (209). For such a person committed suicide, his friends could not but be shocked.

As he commits suicide, old Mr. Park leaves his close friend, old Mr. Ahn, a parting word, “Farewell,” which he has rarely used (205). Old Mr. Ahn feels very sorry about this. However, when he comes to know the real reason why he has committed suicide, he feels pity for him. As they come to know the reason for his suicide, his friends are all depressed, refuse to eat anything his children offer, and leave the funeral in a hurry. The wailing cry of his six children sounds loud.

The meaning of this novel consists in suggesting an alternative to the way in which the friends of old Mr. Park should live after they saw his suicide. At the age of seventy four, old Mr. Ahn is staying at his son’s house. He thinks his lonely life is nothing better than

a wandering cloud in the sky.

If we get older, we become ugly and are not welcomed anywhere. We must not live too long, regardless of our fate. An old parent can be left to die in an open tomb (208).

As the excerpt indicates, old Mr. Ahn is being treated so contemptuously by his children that he says to old Mr. Park that an old parent can be left to die in an open tomb. Old Mr. Ahn once asked his son and daughter-in-law to buy him false teeth, but they were reluctant to do so. Instead, he overheard them saying, “He is so impatient that he cannot live without false teeth at such an old age. He may not know how expensive they are ...” (207). He was so disappointed and dejected at this. When his friend, old Mr. Park committed suicide, he made up his mind, saying to himself, “How much longer shall I live? I won’t read their faces to please them anymore. Instead, I will become again such a harsh father-in-law as I used to be” (219).

This novel deals with the old people who are living in their twilight years. In describing the reason why old Mr. Park committed suicide, this work suggests ways in which old Mr. Ahn can live his own life and give voice to his wills without being intimidated by his children. In most novels, when an old person commits suicide, his or her close friends suffer from severe depression. But in this novel, the suicide of the hero leads one to decide to make his voice heard in a more positive way.

To sum up, the reasons for suicide as they appear in short and medium-length novels that deal with elderly suicide in the 1970s are as follows. First, in the case of *Jung Haak-Joon* in Table 2-2 and *Uncle Suni* in Table 2-3, the heroes commit suicide because they cannot overcome the traumas caused by the politico-cultural evils in Korean society. Jung Haak-Joon commits suicide because he cannot overcome the trauma inflicted under Japanese colonialism, and Uncle Suni commits suicide because she cannot overcome the trauma inflicted during the Jeju 4.3 Incident.

Second, *Blue Smile* in Table 3-1 and *The Death of Old Mr. Park* in Table 3-4 deal with

the alienation and loneliness of the elderly within families as a result of the social reforms in Korea in the 1970. In the 1970s, the material culture in tandem with industrialisation and urbanisation was the main causes of social reform in Korea. As a result of industrialisation, individuals showed more differences than before and interpersonal relations became more mutually exclusive. This phenomenon led to the intensification of such social problems as family breakup and human alienation (Kong Bae-Wan, 2008: 14). *Blue Smile*, which depicts the 1970s in Korea, shows how money, which has economic value, affects father and son relations and renders life empty. Old Mr. Jung Haak-Joon commits suicide by fasting instead of opposing his son's money-oriented marriage. Old Mr. Park in *The Death of Old Mr. Park* commits suicide because of alienation and loneliness in family relationships. Old Mr. Park feels extremely alienated when he is excluded by his six children and cannot even afford new crutches; he has come to face his real life, which is all flash, but no content.

One of the features of the short novels in the 1970s that deal with elderly suicide is that they do not view suicide in a completely negative point of view. Out of father's instinctive love, Jung Haak-Joon fasts until he dies for the happiness of his son. In comparison, old Mr. Ahn in *The Death of Old Mr. Park* makes up his mind to lead a confident and dignified life after he sees the suicide of old Mr. Park.

### 3.4 Short and Medium-length Novels That Deal with Elderly Suicide in the 1980s

<Table 4> Short and Medium-length Novels That Deal with Elderly Suicide in the 1980s

#	Title	Year	Writer	Characters Who Commit Suicide	Motive for Suicide	Suicide Method	Meaning of the Novel	Reactions of Acquaintances
1	<i>Tangible Land</i>	1981	Cho Jung-Rae	Old Man	Heartburnings due to the Inability to Escape the Limits of Tangible Land	Drowning Himself	Converting Individual and Subjective Heartburnings into Sociohistorical Ones	Silence
2	<i>Again in Walmoon -Ri</i>	1988	Song Ki-Won	Mother	She Suffers Hemiplegia and Becomes Pessimistic,	Hanging Herself	Reconciliation between Mother and Son	Son Bitterly Sobs over His Mother's Suicide, but



		4			When She Has her Son Go to Prison			Later He Attempts to be Reconciled with His Mother's Soul
3	<i>Finding One's Roots</i>	1985	Kwon Kwang-Wook	Grandmother	Alienation and Neglect within Families	Agrochemicals	Recovery of Lost Filial Piety	Daughter Injures Herself and Sobs; Eldest Grandson of the Head Family Rages over the Undutiful Eldest Son; Second Son Pays a Secret Visit to the Grave Later and Sobs
4	<i>Landscape A</i>	1988	Kim Eui-Jung	Old Woman	Unable to See the Person She was Waiting for	Gun	Old People Hanging onto the Rope of Time	Situated in a Similar Situation, I am Angry because of Mother Time

As Table 4 shows, short and medium-length novels in the 1980s that deal with elderly suicide involve *Tangible Land*, *Again in Walmoon-Ri*, *Finding One's Roots*, and *Landscape A*. In the literary work *Tangible Land*, four main characters appear. Chun Man-Seok was a son of a slave and was maltreated and abused by the kinsfolk of Jung before the Korean War. When the war breaks out, he becomes the vice-chairman of the People's Council and plays a leading role in executing the family of Jung Chambong. He kills his wife and his boss, and wanders about from place to place as a manual labourer for the rest of his life. He finally comes to his hometown and commits suicide there. Mr. Hwang is not only a friend of Chun Man-Seok but also a saviour, as it were, to him. He is like a living legacy of the hometown which he has been dreaming about. Jum-Rye is the first wife of Chun Man-Seok, and Soon-Im is his second wife who he married at the age of 50. The kinsfolk of Jung are the nobility and landowners of the village where Chun Man-Seok lives. Most of them are executed by the North Korean People's Army. However, as the North Korean People's Army loses the war, they become people of influence again and live in extravagance.

To understand why the hero of *Tangible Land* in Table 4-1, Chun Man-Seok, commits suicide, we need to pay attention to his behaviour. His suicide may be understood in the

light of a class struggle and ideological conflicts. He has been suffering from heartburning because he and his ancestors have for generations been regarded as low men, who had to serve a rich family for a living (216). He wants to give vent to his heartburning by means of the power he can draw from the North Korean People's Army. This act of his may be considered as revenge for all the oppression that he and his ancestors had to suffer under a status system not only during but also before and even after Japanese colonialism, before the Korean War broke out.

Does one have to live a fixed life, whether one is born as a noble or vulgar person?  
…… Do I have to suffer so much just because I have had inflicted injuries on others  
for three or four months? …… Rather, I may be wrong to live until now ……  
Perhaps I will wander about from place to place and die sooner or later (222).

As indicated in the above excerpt, though his name is Man-Seok, which literally means “an exceptionally rich person,” he can never escape the boundary of the status system as long as he was born as a low man. He was fascinated with communism because of the heartburning he cherished against the Jungs, and so he became the vice-chairman of the People's Council and took revenge on them. As a result, he had to leave his family and hometown and wander about from place to place. Still worse, he is now waiting for death. After leaving his hometown and working as a manual labourer from place to place, he looks back on his past, saying, “It has been a long yet swift and empty life ……” (248)

Old Mr. Chun Man-Seok has lived a dejected life as a manual labourer, insofar as he could not escape the influence of tangible land. When he becomes sick and tired of his wandering life, he finally comes to his hometown, drawn by the nostalgia for his hometown. But he finds out that tangible land is still the same. He tries to talk to Mr. Hwang, who knows his inside story, but he finds out that he died ten years ago. Hearing from the tavern-keeper who has moved in, he finds out that tangible land remains the same and the history of revenge and oppression is repeating itself. Though he wants to find a way of reconciliation by seeing Mr. Hwang after visiting his hometown in thirty years,

The old man cannot hear anything. In fact, he did not come to see his hometown, but to see Mr. Hwang. The reason why he could not forget his hometown while he was wandering about from place to place was not only because that was the place where the revengeful spirits of his parents were wandering but also because Mr. Hwang was living there. Unfortunately, however, Mr. Hwang has been dead for ten years ····· This is the third time when he has bought some expensive liquor in his life. He cannot drink it with Mr. Hwang, just as he could not in the past (254).

He came to see Mr. Hwang in vain, who was a living legacy of his hometown. Finding no way of reconciliation, he commits suicide.

The suicide method chosen by the hero of *Tangible Land* is to throw himself into the river from the bridge in his hometown. He could not find any reason to live on, when he found out that Mr. Hwang, a living legacy of his hometown, was already dead. Everybody remained silent when the hero committed suicide in *Tangible Land*.; there was no one who knew him.

The meaning of this novel lies in converting one's individual, subjective heartburning into a socio-historical one. Korean society has suffered from class struggles since the Chosun Dynasty and ideological conflicts, climaxed during the Korean War. In particular, so many latent social contradictions exploded in the Korean War. Those who were born at that time can never avoid the historical aftermath. The fratricidal war due to ideological antagonism and the unsolved political situation has made human lives more bitter, as illustrated by the suicide of old Mr. Chun, who dies a wretched death, unable to overcome the pain of dejection. Such external pressures exert a strong negative influence on the lives of elderly people. To conclude, the writer of this novel highlights the fact that history remains silent about the suffering, resistance, wandering life, and suicide on the part of the disinherited.

The novel *Again in Walmoon-Ri* in Table 4-2, has two major characters. The son becomes a political prisoner in the Kim Dae-Jung Insurrection Conspiracy Incident and is sentenced to ten years' imprisonment. When he visits his mother later and finds out that

his mother did not die of an illness but committed suicide, he anguishes. She was suffering an illness since he was imprisoned, and finally she committed suicide.

The reason why the mother commits suicide in *Again in Walmoon-Ri* is because she suffers hemiplegia and becomes pessimistic when her son goes to prison. She is a very strong woman, who had children with four different men and raised them alone. She had a strong affection for her children. When she was not allowed to see her son in prison on the grounds that her relationship with him was not officially proved, she became sick, came to suffer hemiplegia, and finally committed suicide.

She could not overcome the reality that her son was in prison on the unbelievable charge and that she could not even see him because she could not legally prove her relationship with him, though she was his biological mother ..... In fact, her heartburning may account for her illness and hemiplegia, and her bedridden condition until she dies (203).

As the above excerpt shows, she commits suicide because she contracted heartburning when her son was imprisoned and she could not even see her son. When he finds out the reason why his mother died, the son comes to Seoul and lives totally dejected. But he thinks that his mother's next life has not yet begun and she is waiting for her son at the empty house and visits Walmoon-Ri again.

The suicide method chosen by the heroine in *Again in Walmoon-Ri* is hanging herself and breaking her neck. Suffering from hemiplegia, she cannot even get out of the room. She intentionally sends the neighbour taking care of her on an errand, and manages to creep to the porch. Then she ties a rope to the door handle, and hangs herself. Her neck is broken when she twists her body backwards. When people hang themselves, they usually choke to death (217). But she dies because her neck is broken.

As he finds out that his mother committed suicide, at first the son bitterly sobs but he manages to make up with his mother and live on. He grasps the door handle from which his mother hanged herself and weeps bitterly. He realises that his reconciliation with his mother in the prison was in fact a false one. The next spring, the son pays a visit to the

ruined house in Walmoon-Ri, where his mother committed suicide. He plucks out weeds, cleans the house, makes a fire in the fireplace, and goes to her grave. Then he spreads his bedding and lies near the warm spot of the room, where his mother used to sleep. At that time, the son realises that his mother and he have been united into one, and he hears her saying “Oh my dear son.” He dreams of her as a young mother selling fish in a marketplace with her little son and daughter, and he wakes up. Then he identifies his mother’s heartburning as his own and murmurs, “Let us be reconciled.” After that, the son finds a new hope for his life.

The meaning of *Again in Walmoon-Ri* lies in depicting the painful lives and reconciliation of a mother and her son, who suffered from a turbulent political situation under the military dictatorship in the 1980s. There were many Korean people who gave up their lives in the 1980s because of their suffering in the turbulent political situations of the time. In literary works their heartburning was manifestly expressed by such radical methods like suicide. In this novel the mother kills herself because she cannot overcome her shock at the imprisonment of her son, who resisted the oppression of the time. The son believes that he has to resolve his mother’s heartburning to liberate her soul and comes back to his hometown, where he is reconciled with her and resumes his life of long-suffering.

In Table 4-3, there appear five main characters in the novel *Finding One’s Roots*. Jong-Tae becomes interested in his ancestors and his parents’ hometown as he conducts research for his homework assignment for the ethics subject, titled “Finding One’s Roots.” His uncle tells him many things about his ancestors and he realises that his words and actions have hurt his grandmother. When still young, Kyung-Joong was imprisoned for participating in a demonstration. He was released from prison on a general amnesty on Independence Movement Day. He is 36 years old and lives off his elder brother, helping his nephew with his studies. Dal-Jung is the eldest son and a competent policeman who has a good reputation. He finally puts handcuffs on his younger brother, Kyung-Joong, and sends him to prison. Jang-Hyung is the eldest grandson of the head house of the *Haejoo Choe* clan and regards filial duties as the most important human virtue. He tries to maintain the purity and pride of Sotdaegol village. Feeling hurt by her family members, the mother commits suicide by taking poison near the grave of her

husband.

The motive for suicide in *Finding One's Roots* seems to be the trauma the grandmother suffers through her grandson's contemptuous treatment of her, and her alienation from her family. She loses her vigour after she finds out that it was none other than her eldest son, Dal-Joong, who took her second son, Kyung-Joong, to a police station, when he was arrested for participating in a student demonstration. As she is troubled in mind, she cannot cook well, and her grandson finds the food nauseating. Though she is a mother-in-law, she does household chores, because her daughter-in-law is occupied with evangelism. Though she has brought up her grandson like a prince, who was born after a long wait, he does not eat the box lunches she prepares and brings them back home, saying that they are not good but dirty. Her spicy and salty food does not suit his taste. She is angry at his picky taste. She yells, "Your damned taste is from your mother" (258). Her daughter-in-law happens to hear that when she comes back home, and lays bare all things she has kept hidden and wrangles with her mother-in-law.

The heroine moves to her daughter's house to spend three months there, wondering where she is supposed to live for the rest of her life. After leaving her daughter's house, she visits her mother's house in Kwanghyewon, where she spends two days with her old sister-in-law, lamenting her misfortune, which she has never done before. Then she says goodbye to her sister-in-law and goes to Sotdaegol village, Eumsung, where her old house is and the gravesite of her husband's family. She commits suicide beside the grave of her husband (249). She regarded suicide as taboo, saying that if a person committed suicide, her descendants would be cursed. But in the end, she has chosen suicide (250).

In *Finding One's Roots*, the mother commits suicide by taking an agricultural chemical at the place where the head family is, which symbolises filial duty. The spatial background of this novel is her hometown, Sotdaegol village, in Hyojuklee, is the head house of the *Haejoo Choe* clan. *Sotdae* in Chinese characters is *Hyojuk*, which means a pole of bamboo in remembrance of someone's exemplary filial duty. The filial duties performed by ancestors of Haejoo Choe clan even impressed one of the kings in the past. It was evening twilight in Sotdaegol, a village of filial duties. Unseen by anyone, she went up to Gunjibong, the foot of a mountain, laid on the right side of the grave of her

husband, who had died young, took out the agricultural chemical she had stuffed in her bosom, and took it to put an end to the long journey of her life. Her body is accidentally found by a villager one week later. Her face has been half eaten by a mountain animal.

Let us consider how her acquaintances react to her suicide in *Finding One's Roots*. Before she commits suicide, she stayed at her daughter's house for three months, reading the face of the parents of her son-in-law. Remembering this, her daughter mourns loudly, tearing her clothes and hair while they are digging a grave. Jang-hyung, the eldest grandson of the head family, is shocked because it should not happen in his family known for filial piety. He says that he is too ashamed of the suicide to lift his head up. He is so angry and says that not only Keum-su but also Dal-Jung, her eldest son, must be beheaded. Her second son, Kyung-Jung, comes to the grave of his mother in secret and mourns over her death in silence. He has come to the grave with his nephew, and he is so sad to find out that the grave mound has not been taken care of and has sunk. He says that his mother did commit suicide not only because he had been incarcerated but because of her relations with her grandchildren and mother-in-law. In so saying, he leads his nephew to reflect on his wrongdoings.

The meaning of *Finding One's Roots* reflects the new trend in society concerning the value of filial piety. In this novel, the older generation represented by the mother holds filial piety as dear as life. Filial duties are the best investment for their later years, which guarantees that they will be treated likewise by their children. Despite a hard married life at her parents-in-law's, she did her best to perform her filial duties. But she was deserted by her children. She is a victim of the new perspective on filial duties in society. The writer suggests that this trend should be reversed.

A certain western historian said that Korea would prosper because of her serious view of filial duties. Filial piety was considered a way of life in Korea. I believe that filial duties are the best social security system in the world. Loneliness and alienation among old people cannot be solved by making a lot of money. That is why suicide rates are high in developed countries, which are equipped with good social security systems from the cradle to the grave (259).

As the quotation shows, suicide rates are high in western countries, despite good social security systems. The virtue of filial piety, as emphasised in Korea, is a solution, because it helps the elderly to overcome loneliness and alienation.

Two main characters appear in the novel *Landscape A* in Table 4-4. While waiting to meet a person in a station waiting room in Venice, the city of water, in thirty years, I was lost in thought. I happened to meet with an old woman. As I exchanged a few words with her, I found out that she and I had a lot of things in common. It seemed that the old woman was waiting for someone in the same place every day. But she was reluctant to speak. She uttered some “strange” words to me, left the station, and committed suicide right away.

The suicide motive in *Landscape A* is the failure of the heroine to endure any longer. Although the writer falls short of clarifying the reason for suicide, a hint is given in the depiction of the mental state of the old woman:

I somehow failed to make good use of my time. I just happened to go along with someone and settle down here in a strange land. I am left alone, far away from my friends, here where there is no one I know. I am forlorn. I am lonely to death. I am distressed to death (284).

I was waiting for my lost time to come back to me. But it never happened. It seems that it will never happen. I need to recover my lost time in order to go back to Istanbul and see my old beloved friends (284).

As the excerpt shows, the old woman who failed to make good use of her time feels lonely, forlorn, and distressed. She is waiting for someone, and she failed to make use of her time and place. She commits suicide as the person does not appear. She can no longer wait for him from whom she has been separated for thirty years.

The suicide method in *Landscape A* is with a gun. After the last train arrives, she says goodbye to me, leaves the station waiting room, and then shoots herself to death.



I could not say anything in response. I was sitting there, neither moving nor speaking as if I were a mummy. Less than a couple of minutes after she left, I heard a gunshot from the hall and the trampling sound of hasty footsteps approaching the scene (285).

Now we consider how other characters react to the suicide of the old woman in *Landscape A*. The old woman who has left the waiting room ahead of me commits suicide because she can no longer wait for her time. I am angry at times too, because I know the reason why she killed herself.

A flame of anger is rising within me against time, which is an eternal enemy of human beings (286).

The meaning of *Landscape A* lies in saying that we may wait for something which is impossible, as the old woman did in the station waiting room. She and I were waiting for somebody in a strange city, but we were frustrated by the wall of irrevocable time. We were waiting for something that would never come. The writer seems to be saying that old people live a difficult life as they wait in confidence for someone or something to come. Old people must tackle time, as if they were living an unstable life in a strange city.

To sum up, short and medium-length novels that deal with elderly suicide in the 1980s can be classified into three types. First, there are novels that deal with suicide due to political trauma. *Again in Walmoon-Ri* in Table 4-2 reflects the political atmosphere in the 1980s. The 1980s were the period of birth pangs in which the industrialisation that had begun in the 1970s was accelerated and the traditional life style was being denied in favour of a new life style by industrial capitalism. In the same period, Korean society was expecting the emergence of a democratic government after the fall of the Yushin regime in 1979; but such an expectation was crushed by the emergence of the new military group and their authoritarian regime after the Gwangju Democratisation Movement in 1980, leaving an indelible psychological trauma on the Korean people. The June Democratisation Movement of 1987 against the military dictatorship made a remarkable change to Korean politics by giving rise to a civilian government. In this

regard, the 1980s can be characterised as a period of conflicts between authoritarian anti-democratic powers and democratic powers. “I” in *Again in Walmoon-Ri* was put in prison because of the Gwangju Democratisation Movement and “my” mother commits suicide after she gained a heartburning when her son was imprisoned. In other words, this suicide can be explained in the light of the Korean political situation. In the background of *Finding One’s Roots* in Table 4-3 is also the political situation in Korea in the 1980s. It deals with the pain of the older generation that is neither loved nor respected by their children. The author presents filial duties as the answer to such a problem.

Second, there was a severe gap between the rich and the poor in Korean society in the 1980s. As a result, labourers and farmers could not enjoy a minimum standard of living. *Tangible Land* in Table 4-1 depicts the life of a manual worker, that reflects the structure of social status, i.e., the insurmountable gap between noble people and low people.

Third, there are novels that deal with the existential problem of lonely old people. There are many cases in which old people commit suicide because they are alienated by their beloved people or close friends. In contrast, *Landscape A* in Table 4-4 foregrounds the life of a lonely old person who is struggling in a chaotic life. She is waiting for something. She is not absorbed in any special ideology or religion. Nor does she give up every hope in isolation. She waits for somebody in the hope of a new awareness. She is eager to find the possibility of new thoughts. But when such an expectation is crushed, she lets go of her time. She can no longer wait, and she shoots herself to death.

### 3.5 Short and Medium-length Novels That Deal with Elderly Suicide in the 1990s

<Table 5> Short and Medium-length Novels That Deal with Elderly Suicide in the 1990s

#	Title	Year	Writer	Characters Who Commit Suicide /Age	Motive for Suicide	Suicide Method	Meaning of the Novel	Reactions of Acquaintances
1	<i>Inheritance</i>	1990	Jung Chan-Joo	Parents-in-law	Crippled Husband and Wife Commit Suicide in	Jumping off a Cliff	Parents’ Suicide Enable their Daughter and Son-in-Law to	Daughter is Reconciled with Her Husband after the Suicide of

					the Hope of Rebirth		Solve Conflicts	Her Parents.
2	<i>Music Sound</i>	1992	Lee Cheong-Hae	An Old Man (Han Soon-Boon/73)	Loneliness and Alienation of a Senior Citizen Who Lives Alone	Jumping off an Apartment Building	Trauma of War and Loneliness of a Senior Citizen who Lives Alone	Nobody Cares.
3	<i>A Lotus-persimmon Tree in Jangkok-Ri</i>	1992	Lee Moon-Goo	Ghi-Chool/72	Dispute over Inheritance and the Government's Failed Agricultural Policies	Hanging Himself	Grief over Stagnant Conditions in Rural Areas and a Sense of Betrayal toward the Children Who Dispute their Inheritance	Bong-Chool understands Ghi-Chool Who Hanged Himself from a Lotus-persimmon Tree and Cuts the Tree Down.
4	<i>Cheongyang-g-Ri Station</i>	1993	Song Ha-Choon	Grandma of Tae-Joon	Commits Suicide in Fear that the Status of Her Children Would be Revealed	Taking Drugs	Suicide of an Old Woman Who Was Abandoned by Her Son and Daughter-in-law	A Police Officer Wonders Whether the Suicide Could Have Been Prevented, but Life Goes Back to Its Ordinary Routine.
5	<i>A Few Episodes concerning Death</i>	1993	Hyun Ghil-Eon	An old Woman Living in the Adjacent Apartment Complex	Loneliness	Plunges from an Apartment	One Needs Courage to Live out One's Natural Lifespan	Someone Says that One Should Not Shorten One's Natural Lifespan.
6	<i>Sam Island</i>	1998	Lee Seung-Woo	Uncle (Kim Il-Joong)	Elderly Suicide due to Guilt	Stops Taking Medicine and Fasts	He Lives in Guilt for the Rest of His Life after Succumbing to a Fleeting Temptation.	They Understand the Mentality of the Suicide and Mourns over His Death.

As Table 5 indicates, there are six short and medium-length novels that deal with elderly suicide in the 1990s: *Inheritance*, *Music Sound*, *A Lotus-persimmon Tree in Jangkok-Ri*, *Cheongyang-Ri Station*, *A Few Episodes concerning Death*, and *Sam Island*.

*Inheritance* of Table 5-1 has four major characters. "I" the narrator of this novel. During the Kwangju Democratisation Movement, I was caught by soldiers who were killing

civilians, but I was saved by a restaurant owner. I married his daughter, but I am currently living separately from her. She is thin-skinned. She is in a state of dejection after she suffered a miscarriage two times. She was shocked at her father being tortured, and she became disillusioned about human beings. His father-in-law was born in North Korea but moved to South Korea during the Korean War. He was a teacher at a dancing school when he met his present wife, who was his third wife. After marriage, he began to run a Chinese restaurant. He is not faithful to his wife, which makes her always very nervous. Still, she tries to show that she loves him by going wherever he goes.

*Inheritance* depicts a familial joint suicide committed by people who were suffering from nostalgia for their hometown and who were sacrificed by political authorities. My father-in-law moved from the north to the south. He was in despair because he could not visit his hometown for more than forty years. In addition, he has lived for ten years with back pain which he contracted after he helped one of the hostages to escape the restaurant during the Kwangju Democratisation Movements. The man he helped with at that time is his son-in-law. One day he complains about his situation to his son-in-law.

If I cannot die a natural death, I had better go as close as possible to my hometown and kill myself. Maybe my body will be drifted on the waves to the north (237).

My father-in-law has nostalgia for his hometown. On the day when he complained about his fate, he shaved himself and combed his hair beautifully, as if he were about to leave the hospital. It is said that people act differently before they die. He says that the surgery fee is too expensive and that he cannot go to his hometown as he is.

It has been exactly 40 years since I left the north. It's over. It is no more possible for me to see my parents or relatives. Even if I can go there, I am in such an unseemly condition. I know the condition of my body better than anyone else. It couldn't be worse. I don't need any operations. At the best, I will be able to walk. It is obvious that I will spend money from hospital to hospital (248).

One day, my parents-in-law jump off a steep cliff in the K. Island, with their wrists tied by a scarf. Their daughter and son-in-law, who are separated, hear of the news and go to

the place. When they identify the dead bodies, they are first frightened and shocked. But when they see the scarf, they are deeply moved.

The meaning of *Inheritance* is unique in the sense that the main characters do not commit suicide because of familial conflicts, economic pressure, or disappointment at children, but because they can overcome neither their strong nostalgia for their hometown, as a result of the division of Korean, and their political sufferings due to the Kwangju Democratisation Movement in 1980. Both factors are historical rather than personal.

In *Inheritance*, the characters commit suicide by jumping off a steep cliff with the wrists tied. The place of suicide is described as follows:

I see a cliff that is a border between here and the C. town. The cliff is very steep and comprised of two faces. The scene is even mysterious and beautiful, but it allows nobody to look ahead at the sea with one more step. Such a stern appearance seems to have the magical power to lure people to give up their lives easily (249)  
…… The cliff looked scarier than expected (251).

The father-in-law in *Inheritance* has a positive view of suicide, because he believes in reincarnation.

The other day, I talked with my wife. I said, “Let’s believe in the next life.” Then she said, “Why not?”, explaining to me the concept of reincarnation. Her point was that death is not the end. The body decays, but the soul is transferred to the body of a new born person, according to his or her karma. While I was listening to her, I felt better. Actually I had been afraid that I would simply suffer, die, and disappear. Finally, I came to have the courage to kill myself (248).

As the above except shows, the father-in-law courageously decides to commit suicide because he has come to believe in reincarnation after death.

I became emotionally stable, after I see the scarf that tied the arms of my parents-in-law and their peaceful faces.

I didn't think that they had done well to commit suicide. But I could feel how much they had loved each other (249) ..... Their wrists were tied together with the scarf which I had given to my wife as a present ..... Now my wife, who had been just weeping, fell down to the ground. Her shoulders began to tremble. I was no more scared. Instead, I realised something deep in my heart. It seemed that the scarf was telling us the way in which we were supposed to live. I put the scarf into my bag and moved a few steps toward the sea (251).

As the excerpt shows, "I" does not think that they did well to kill themselves but he thinks that their love was touching. The scarf that tied their hands makes them, even though frightened, realise something. My wife and I are moved by their love. The eyes of my wife are shining with deep emotion, and I am determined not to be selfish any more. My wife and I hug each other for a long time in front of the ancestral rites table. I was not sure whether I had to talk about divorce with my wife as I was going to take care of the dead bodies of my parents-in-law. But the moment I saw the scarf around their wrists, I realised something and gave her a reconciling hug.

The meaning of *Inheritance* lies in depicting suicide as helping to solve the problem of the children. Whereas most of elderly suicides in novels are due to frustrations in life, the suicide depicted in *Inheritance* is based on the concept of reincarnation, in hopes that life can be transferred, as if from one room to another, to another blissful life. As the title itself reveals, the death of their parents enabled their daughter and son-in-law to understand and love each other. Ironically, the former's death becomes an inheritance for the latter in the sense that it helps the latter to solve marital problems and be reconciled.

Two major characters appear in the novel *Music Sound* of Table 5-2. A 73-year-old woman, named Han Soon-Boon, lost her husband during the Korean War and raised her son alone. She is being supported by her son, Hyoung-Joon, who has to read the wife's face.

Han Soon-Boon commits suicide because she is living alone and lonely, and because of her trauma due to the war. She is 73 years old. She lives independently of her daughter-

in-law because of conflicts with her. Her son asked her to go to a nursing home, but she refused. According to her, a nursing home is a place for those who, like beggars, have no children or supporters (124). Instead, she decides to live alone in a small apartment.

Except for weekends, Han Soon-Boon spends most of her time living alone, waiting for the phone call from her son. She feels always forlorn and lonely except when she imagines herself talking to her visiting son or when she looks up into the sky where her son lives. On a certain Saturday one week after she moved in, she happens to hear the sound of Korean traditional musical instruments from a nearby playground, which reminds her of her forgotten memories, i.e., the undeserved death of her husband. As a result, she suffers from severe pain on weekends. During the Korean War her 39-year-old husband, Young-Bok, was severely tortured and killed by the North Korean People's Army "on a certain sultry, uncomfortable, and regrettable day" (130), under the false charge that he had played a leading role in assisting the South Korean army. As she hears the sound of Korean traditional instruments on Saturdays, she recalls what happened to her husband on the day when she heard the same music sound.

On a certain Saturday, the old woman receives a phone call from a marketing agent of a department store and visits the department store to meet with her. But she is treated as a weird old woman by other employees and comes back home absent-minded. At home, she hears the same sound of Korean traditional instruments, which reminds her again of her dead husband and causes her to have a paralysing nightmare (135). Next Sunday, she jumps off the apartment when it is about time that the same music sound was to be heard.

Suicide means freedom and liberation to Han Soon-Boon. Let us look at the description of her psychological state at the moment of suicide.

A gong musical instrument was about to sound. The cheerful sound of a *taebyeongso* reached her ears. She jumped off the window lightly. At that moment, she felt refreshed as if she were playing on the swings. She felt as if something like the net that had wrapped around her during her whole life was embracing and tightening around her body. Finally she could feel a sense of liberation. She felt light as if she could fly. It gave her such a cosy feeling. It felt as if everything were

accomplished. She saw the weedy grave of her husband underneath. She was warmly greeted by the beautiful flower garden of her parents' home of the past (136).

As the above excerpt shows, the old woman living alone receives a phone call from a female employee of the department store and pays her a visit there. She is missing kind and loving people. But she experiences a higher degree of alienation, and commits suicide after seeing her husband in a dream.

In *Music Sound*, people react to her suicide in three ways. First, two days after the suicide, there appears a story in the newspaper about the suicide of an old woman who could not overcome alienation and loneliness, along with the title of her son, the president of a trading company. The newspaper report criticises the absence of filial piety, the selfish system of a nuclear family that neglects old parents, and unethical rich people. Second, her neighbours sympathise with her and say that she looked somewhat insane when she moved in and she often cried looking toward where her son was living. Third, the narrator says that nobody knows why the old woman fell off the window. This statement reflects the social reality that is not concerned about the death of a lonely old person.

The meaning of *Music Sound* lies in portraying the way in which the ideological conflicts due to the Korean War has an influence on the life of an old person even after forty years. This novel shows how the enormous power of a historic event influences the fate of a woman, and depicts the lonely, desolate life of a lonely old woman. In so doing, this novel asks the question of how we can take care of old people like her.

Two main characters appear in the novel *A Lotus-persimmon Tree in Jangkok-Ri* by Lee Moon-Goo. Lee Ghi-Chool is a stingy farmer. His first son runs a business and pesters him for funds. Lee Ghi-Chool commits suicide, because he has lost any interest in life after he saw his children dispute over their inheritance and he witnessed the failure of the government's agricultural policies. He is a 72-year-old person who has lived as a farmer his whole life. He is also a stingy person who has never wasted a penny. Then, his 50-year-old son asks him to sell his rice paddy and support his business. But he refuses to do so and says that farming is all about effort, and business is just a means (307) and that



he cannot succeed in life without effort. He is sorry that his children dispute over their inheritance whenever they meet.

Moreover, as the government allegedly aims to benefit farmers by executing such policies as the Uruguay Round and the Comprehensive Plans for the Development of the Farming and Fishing Villages, it becomes legal to buy and sell agricultural land freely, as a result of which the price of land becomes cheaper. He put his trust in the plans for farming and fishing villages adduced as elections pledges for the local self-government election. But he was disappointed to find out that they have nothing to do with ordinary farmers (317). He says that he has lost any interest in his life and hangs himself on a lotus-persimmon tree in the backyard, which is considered useless.

The lotus-persimmon tree, which is also the title of the novel, has a symbolic meaning. It is a “useless tree,” symbolising the old man, Lee Ghi-Chool.

It is not a fruit tree. Then what is it? …… If it is a young tree, it could be grafted onto a persimmon tree. Since it is good for nothing, it is covered with noisy magpies. It will be good for firewood only (307).

Lee Ghi-Chool thinks that he is a useless old man at age 72 and hangs himself on the useless lotus-persimmon tree. The author highlights the meaning of the novel by likening the life of Ghi-Chool to the value of the lotus-persimmon tree.

Let us look at how the hero acts differently immediately before he kills himself and how people react to his suicide in *A Lotus-persimmon Tree in Jangkok-Ri*. The behaviour of Lee Ghi-Chool is dramatically changed on his birthday, after his children are gone after a dispute over inheritance. He used to smoke domestic cigarettes sparingly but now he begins to smoke expensive imported cigarettes as much as he likes. He drinks beer instead of soju. He takes a taxi when he goes downtown. He spends a lot of money which he has borrowed from a bank, while his land is not yet sold. He is no longer thrifty (306). He has realised that his thrifty life is no longer meaningful in view of his greedy children.

Finally, his children dispute over their inheritance during his funeral. Nobody mourns for

the father. Nobody cares about the feeling of the mother. While looking at what is happening at the funeral, Bong-Chool hears villagers say that Ghi-Chool killed himself because he had lost any interest in life. Shocked at this saying, he sympathises with Ghi-Chool and cuts down the useless lotus-persimmon tree.

The meaning of *A Lotus-persimmon Tree in Jangkok-Ri* is closely related to the motive for suicide. The hero commits suicide because he grieves over the difficult lives of farmers due to the government's agricultural policies and over the fact that his children dispute over their inheritance. The author asks a question, "What meanings can we find in our lives in which we have lost any interest."

Two main characters appear in the novel *Cheongyang-Ri Station* in Table 5-4. An old mother is deserted by her son and commits suicide in a hurry for fear that the identity of her children may be revealed. The son deserts his mother at Cheongyang-Ri Station and disappears.

The heroine in *Cheongyang-Ri Station* kills herself for fear that the identity of her children who have abandoned her may be divulged. Her son, who lost his job and was financially pressed, and his wife desert their old mother at Cheongyang-Ri Station on a certain day of September. Her son tells her to wait a minute and passes silently through the turnstile and gets on a train. The old mother does not say or do anything. She is sitting beneath a pillar near the station waiting room all day long. She is sent to a police station as an abandoned old woman. The narrator depicts the old woman as "an old woman like a package." As she hears those around her say that they have seen the woman who abandoned her and that the woman should be arrested to confront her, she impulsively moves her body and looks heavily at the square outside. Then she falls into deep loneliness. That is the moment when she decides to kill herself. At that moment, the police make a fuss by saying that they will find the woman and make her confront the old woman face to face. In the meantime, the old woman takes a pill she is carrying and kills herself. She commits suicide in order not to get her son in trouble. A policeman takes care of her body and says, "Who said that we should find the woman and make her confront this old woman face to face? Nobody should have said so" (175).

In the small handbag were a pair of underwear, a crumpled handkerchief, a pair of old socks, a ten-thousand won bill, three thousand won bills, and some pills wrapped in paper. That was it (170).

The old woman refused to say anything about her home and family and said that the pill—which in fact was a poisonous pill—was just a sleeping pill. She hurriedly took the pill and fell to the ground.

In *Cheongyang-Ri Station*, people put on an air of indifference concerning the suicide of the old woman. While policemen are gone to search for the woman who abandoned the old woman, the old woman takes a pill and falls to the ground. But the police are not interested in why she killed herself or who would be responsible for her suicide. Moreover, there is no one in the station waiting room who is sorry about her death. All the police have to do is just take her body to another place in a car. Furthermore, her son and daughter-in-law who abandoned her do not even know the fact that their mother killed herself by taking a poisonous pill, because they already left Cheongyang-Ri Station.

The meaning of *Cheongyang-Ri Station* lies in problematising the modern version of *Goryeojang*, an ancient practice of abandoning an old parent to die at the grave site. Although her children abandoned her, the old mother just killed herself for fear that they should be in trouble. This story does not seem to be very unfamiliar in our society characterised by the trend of a nuclear family. The following shows how parental love exceeds filial love.

I just want to see you one more time while I am sane.

I just want to see you one more time while I am alive (160).

These are lines of a poem—which is not exactly a poem—written on the wall of a senior welfare centre in Seoul. They are written by an old woman who has had a stroke. This woman misses her children, who entrusted her with others. We can see everlasting parental love. (“The modern meaning of *Goryeojang*,” Editorialist Han Sam-Hee, Chosun Daily Newspaper, 11/15/2004)

Three major characters appear in the novel *A Few Episodes concerning Death* in Table 5-5. An old man fainted because of high blood pressure three months ago. He is receiving rehabilitation treatment, but he refuses to be assisted by anyone around him. He used to be a general in the army and the president of a company, but he is nothing but a handicapped old man. He lives in apartment 903 and criticises the death of an old woman in apartment building 16. “I” sympathise with him and want to help him. The old woman living in apartment building 16 was a friend of his and visited him frequently. She was in a state of dejection after her husband died. She committed suicide by jumping off her friend’s apartment building.

The motive for suicide and the suicide method are as follows. The old woman frequently visited the old man and his wife living in apartment 903. She has two sons with a doctor’s degree living in America. She has a rich daughter and son-in-law who are living in Seoul. She has lived alone after her husband died. Then she jumps off the apartment building with a note of her son’s phone number and address in her hand. She kills herself because she cannot overcome loneliness.

Let us consider how people react to the suicide of the old woman in *A Few Episodes concerning Death*. “I” think that her small bent body is like a sparrow shot down by a hunter; she does not bleed a lot, lying on her side (165). The old man criticises her saying, “She should not have committed suicide. Her life is not her own. She is a conceited old woman” (166).

Every old person is tempted to commit suicide, because it is frustrating to look at one’s body becoming ugly and to feel lonely and alienated in society. In fact, what is most frustrating is the fact that he or she is approaching a dead end in the sense that death is inevitable in the near future. People may be tempted to commit suicide because it may make them feel a sense of control over their life. But it is vain greed. Humans should live as long as they can until they die. That is our fate, just as we were not born in this world according to our will (167).

As the above excerpt shows, the narrator thinks that suicide is vain greed, although old people may well be tempted to commit suicide because of frustration over loneliness and

alienation, and that it is one's responsibility to live as long as fate allows.

The meaning of *A Few Episodes concerning Death* lies in highlighting that one's attitude toward life is more important than anything else as one grows older. Old people can lose a sense of identity or self-respect, although they may have been rich and powerful enough when young. This novel says that suicide is an option that may be chosen by such people. After all, the most dreadful thing for old people is loneliness and alienation, which are more dreadful than death itself. The author tries to say that one should look back on one's life honestly and find a true life.

I hope that people accept, rather than fear, alienation and deficiency by believing that alienation may bring about freedom and deficiency may be more valuable than sufficiency (167).

As the excerpt shows, old people cannot help experiencing a season of alienation and deficiency. The point of the author is that it is important to accept that reality and try to feel freedom amidst alienation and to be content with deficiency.

The local background of the novel *Sam Island* of Table 5-6 is Walsan-Ri village south of the Korean Peninsula and a small island, Sam Island, in the offing. Six main characters appear in this novel. Kim Il-Joon is closely related to the Sam Island incident. He lives in pain for the rest of his life after he loved the mother of Yoon-Doo and committed an irrevocable sin. "I" am an editing reporter of a magazine publisher and visits Walsan-Ri, which is the hometown of Yoon-Doo, a painter, to cover Sam Island and interview Kim Il-Joong. Hwang Jung-Yeon is a photographer of the same magazine publisher. The head of the village tells the reporter about the past history of Walsan-Ri and Sam Island, and a mart owner, who is a nephew of Kim Il-Joon, provides lodging for him and cares about his safety.

The motive for suicide in *Sam Island* is hope for reconciliation in order to become free from guilt. "I," the narrator, and Hwang Jung-Yeon go to Walsan-Ri, hometown of my friend Yoon-Doo to cover the village. We decide to stay longer because we have heard from the head of the village of some incident relating to the village and Sam Island. We

happened to hear of Kim Il-Joon there. He left this village forty years ago and has recently returned. He acts weirdly. For example, he is seriously ill but he has been to Sam Island by rowing a boat himself.

Kim Il-Joon was responsible for the killing of thirty young people in the village during the Korean War forty years ago. He loved the mother of Yoon-Doo so much that he informed the North Korean People's Army of a cave in Sam Island where young people, including the father of Yoon-Doo, were hiding. As a result, they were all killed. He has been obsessed with the sense of guilt ever since. He did not marry but just spent time making money. Forty years later, he returns to his hometown and attempts to reconstruct the desolate Sam Island in many ways. But the island is not restored. Then he confesses his wrongdoings, which he committed when young, to Yoon-Doo and goes to the cave in Sam Island to burn incense for the deceased and worship them. He offers his life as a sacrifice.

Let us consider the psychological state of Kim Il-Joong as he commits suicide. He has been obsessed with a sense of guilt during his whole life, because he was responsible for the death of young people and the mother of Yoon-Doo. This is depicted as follows:

He is never interested in matchmaking …… I once asked him why. He sighed, saying, “How can a sinner like me get married?” (289)

My uncle used to say that he must die in Sam Island. He said he must die in the cave of the island. It bothers me (286).

After his attempts to restore Sam Island turned out to be failures, old Kim Il-Joong decides to offer his life as the last sacrifice to the island, because he was responsible for the death of young people of the village. He stops taking medicine and goes in the cave of the island and commits suicide for atonement.

I did not know that he was so ill. I did not have the slightest idea …… They say that the heart of an old person will burst if he or she stops taking medicine that the

body requires. …… I suspected that he had intentionally left his medicine behind. But I could not utter any words (291).

The old man died. In front of several sticks of incense, he died while smelling incense. He might have burned incense for himself (292).

What about the reactions to his death on the part of his acquaintances? At first, Yoon-Doo did not forgive Kim Il-Joong, because of how his parents had died, when he confessed his wrongdoings to him. But he finally forgives him as he hears of his death. “I” say that it was the best way for him to go to Sam Island and sacrifice his life as an atoning offering.

Probably he identified Sam Island with his soul, as Yoon-Doo guesses. The restoration of the island would have meant the restoration of his soul, and the forgiveness of his wrongdoing by the spirits hovering around the island …… The old man has thought of the last thing he could do for the restoration of the island. It was to sacrifice his life as an offering. It was to worship the spirits using his body as an offering. By doing so, he wanted to be forgiven by the spirits and make the wells in Sam Island filled with water again …… There was no other way for him. He has simply chosen that way (300).

As the above excerpt shows, “I,” the narrator, construes the attempt of the old man to restore Sam Island as a way of restoring his soul. The head of the village and his nephew are very sorry about the death of the old man. Thus, those around him are not critical or cynical about his suicide. On the contrary, they view his suicide as an act of reconciliation and forgiveness.

The meaning of *Sam Island* lies in dealing with the ontological feelings of an old man who has lived with a strong sense of guilt.

What was the memory which did not vanish but became more obvious and manifest

with time, and which made his wound more vulnerable? How could such a memory control the life of a man? (293)

As the excerpt shows, the old man tries to restore Sam Island, confesses his wrongdoings to Yoon-Doo, and asks for forgiveness from the spirits, in order to overcome an unforgettable memory that controlled his whole life. But he commits suicide as he finds out that he cannot overcome that memory, no matter what he may do to make up for his wrongdoings.

To summarise, there are novels that deal with elderly suicide caused by traumas due to Japanese colonial rule, the Korean War, or the division of Korea into north and south. In the 1990s, the world saw the Cold War end and postmodernist discourse, which emphasises insignificant daily lives suppressed under such meta-narratives as ideologies, become popular. At the same time, they could speak more freely about experiences relating to Japanese colonial rule, the Korean War, and the division of Korea into north and south. *Inheritance* of Table 4-1 depicts the life of an old man who left North Korea because of the Korean War, who became physically handicapped under the military dictatorship, and who committed suicide as he could not afford the expensive surgery fees. Likewise, *Music Sound* of Table 4-2 depicts an old woman who lived alone and committed suicide as she could not overcome the trauma she gained when her husband died during the Korean War. *Sam Island* of Table 4-6 gives a detailed depiction of an old man who had to live with a sense of guilt for what he had done during the Korean War.

Second, there are novels that handle elderly suicide due to loneliness and alienation, lack of self-identity, all of which are caused by familial conflicts. In *Cheongyang-Ri Station* of Table 5-4, the old woman who commits suicide has been abandoned in a station by her children, who could no longer support their mother because of economic problems. This reflects Korean society in the 1990s. In the 1990s, Korean society underwent a rapid fragmentation with an increase of national income, which brought about not only an affluent society but also a society of uncertainty and conflicts. In particular, after the IMF crisis in 1997, Korean society saw many divorces and accordingly a rapid fragmentation of the family until the early 2000s. It was the elderly who were most affected by this trend. The abandonment of poor old people was often reported in the newspaper. In



comparison *A Few Episodes concerning Death*, depicts the old man who commits suicide as a rich person and his children are all successful people. But he kills himself because of loneliness and solitariness. *A Lotus-persimmon Tree in Jangkok-Ri* depicts an old farmer who commits suicide because of the failure of the government's agricultural policies and his children's dispute over inheritance. He kills himself as he cannot find any value or meaning in his life.

### 3.6 Short and Medium-length Novels That Deal with Elderly Suicide from the late 2000s to the Present

<Table 6> Short and Medium-length Novels That Deal with Elderly Suicide from the late 2000s to the Present

#	Title	Year	Writer	Characters Who Commit Suicide	Motive for Suicide	Suicide Method	Meaning of the Novel	Reactions of Acquaintances
1	<i>Winter Cactus</i>	2001	Kwon Chae-Woon	Old Woman	Ignored by Her Children	Fasting	Even Positive People Can Commit Suicide Instantaneously.	Those Old People Who Went to the Senior Citizens' Centre with Her are Perplexed.
2	<i>I Need a Vacation</i>	2007	Kim Yeon-Soo	Old Man (Ex-detective)	Guilt for Wrong doings	Drowning	After Reading Books, He Realises that He was Simply a Tool of the Military Government and Tries to Atone for His Wrong.	The Librarian Who Knows the Old Man's Past Says that He Needed a Vacation.

There are two short novels in the 2000s that deal with elderly suicide: *Winter Cactus* and *I Need a Vacation*. Four main characters appear in the novel *Winter Cactus* of Table 6-1. An old woman (narrator) living in room 101 raised her son alone since her husband defected to North Korea fifty years ago. Her son was killed in a car accident twenty years ago and she is living with her daughter-in-law and granddaughters. She mourns most

deeply over the death of the old woman living in room 307, because they have been close friends. The old woman living in room 307 was a most energetic and positive person and was very popular among old people. But she has been blamed by her son for buying some false medicine at an expensive price. She has become despondent and stops eating anything and dies. The rich old landlady has bought the false medicine more regularly than anyone else. She was deceived by the seller just like other old people, but she says that it was a pleasant experience. The director of the headquarters of CheilAstra attracted people in the streets or marketplaces by means of music and acrobats and sold medicine to them. He is so eloquent that many old people are deceived by him.

The motive for suicide in *Winter Cactus* is the failure of an old parent to swallow her children's criticism. The old woman living in room 307 is most popular with her friends. She is good at cooking, speaking, and singing, which moves the hearts of her friends. She is good at gathering information and provides her friends with some opportune information. Wherever she goes, she makes her friends refreshed and pleasant. In order not to become a burden to her daughter-in-law, who is suffering hardships, she packs lunch and takes care of household chores. While she is such a positive woman, she stops eating anything and dies in ten days. Her friends do not understand why. The narrator explains the reason why she commits suicide as follows:

The old woman living in room 307 may have felt embarrassed because she did not buy anything others were buying, while behaving in a playful manner. Above all, other old people must have bought "*chitosan*" carelessly because they could not resist the temptation to dance on the broad back of the director of the headquarters. There were no sons or daughters who would like their parents to buy unproved medicine for their bodies. The old woman of room 307 was extremely disappointed when her son said a few words to her about the medicine. At other times, she would not have bothered and have just said, "You will know when you are old enough. You will soon know that." But somehow she could not distract her mind for a long time. That might have been her destiny. She just stopped eating (45).

As the above excerpt shows, she could not get over her son's scolding words and stopped eating and died. She died by fasting.

Let us look at how people react to her suicide. The old woman living in room 101, who is as old as she, is very sorry about her death, and her close friends miss her a lot.

Having heard that she was lying in her sickbed, some friends visited her with some beverages; she was lying in bed in a very decent appearance. She just smiled faintly saying, “Probably it is time that I should die, for I cannot swallow rice.” Ten days after she started fasting, she passed away. That may have been her fate. She used to say that she was afraid to die alone and so she needed company. But she dared to take a long trip alone without saying goodbye to me (40).

I did not even imagine that it would be my last present for her. Since we are of the same age, I have been more attracted to her than to anyone else. But she is gone like this (39).

As the above excerpt shows, the friends of the woman who committed suicide, including the old woman living in room 101, realised the vanity of life as she passed away after fasting ten days. The meaning of *Winter Cactus* is implied in the title itself.

Although this does not look beautiful, it contains very beautiful blossoms. Beautiful red blossoms appear on each leaf, as long as it is watered once in a while and exposed to sunshine. When blossoms appear around the cactus, it looks like a candle …… My sons and daughters tell me to throw it away because it occupies some space. It has no thorns, though it looks like a cactus. What is wrong with it? (39)

A winter cactus bears beautiful red blossoms, which look like a candle, only if it is watered once in a while and exposed to sunshine. The old woman of room 307 was like a winter cactus that blooms on barren land. But she was despised by her daughter-in-law, because she occupied some space. Finally, she withdraws. Thus, *Winter Cactus* represents the lives of old people who are still useful yet alienated within the family.

In particular, the death of the old woman living in room 307, who was like a winter

cactus, significantly implies that old people who still have a sound mentality can commit suicide. The point is that even positive old people who cheer other people up can give up their lives easily, if they are hurt by what their sons or daughters say to them. The plot of this novel may be somewhat loose in that a positive old person commits suicide so easily. Still the author tries to represent the kind of alienation and loneliness old people experience by depicting their psychology, as it is revealed by their attempt to buy false medicine even at an unreasonable price. The purchase of medicine symbolises the desire of old people to escape from the “manifestations of alienation.”

Won't *Cheil Astra* come back again? That was the most pleasant moments, though I used my money up ..... Isn't it strange? I felt completely healthy at that time. I was so excited. I couldn't wait to go there. I could not even eat food. Just the thought of it made my heart flutter. I must have been bewitched. I never regret using up money, though my sons and daughters think that it was a waste of money (52).

As the above excerpt shows, the young director of the headquarters of *Cheil Astra* is like a god to the old people. It was none other than happiness that he gave them. The reason why they wanted to enjoy that kind of happiness is . . . .

When I ask something out of curiosity, everybody answers inattentively. Old people must eat what is given and keep silent (58).

As this excerpt shows, old people must face the reality that they are despised by others. Therefore, old people feel happy when they are accepted by someone else.

Three main characters appear in the novel *I Need a Vacation* of Table 6-2. One of them is an old ex-detective man who used to torture students involved in pro-democracy movements. Once he tortured a female college student so severely that she died. Her eagle-eyed look was so strong that he has been since obsessed by it. Mr. Kang, who is a librarian, happened to become acquainted with him and knows about his past. Mr. Kang is shocked at the news of his suicide. His son receives the news that the body of his father,

who left the home ten years ago when he was in the 11<sup>th</sup> grade, has been found and comes to the library to check it out.

The motive for suicide in *I Need a Vacation* is a sense of guilt. An old man comes to a library in a rural area to read books every day for ten years. At the age of 45, he was stranded for three years on a desert island near Shiji Island, Jeonnam. After his rescue, he immediately resigned his job and disappeared without any notice to his family. He used his retirement allowance to lease a house in a rural city and began to read books in a little library every day. The reason why he spends most of his time reading books is as follows:

I began to read books in a library in order to forget the strong glitter of her eyes. My original intention was to gather information and data to write a book. I wanted to make a contribution to the record of Korean history that would reflect right values, a history of people who sweated and bled in order to protect our country. At that time, I thought everything went wrong. I believed that young people were being contaminated by wrong ideologies because they did not know how our country had been protected and developed (139).

As the above excerpt shows, the old man wanted to record Korean history right. The more he read in the library, the more frequently he met with such sentences as, “I have a dream” or “We have a right to live a happy life,” which not only made him think that the truth may not be that simple but also reminded him of the glittering eyes of the female student. He is tortured by the thought that the student must have had a dream, as it was reflected in her eyes, and have had a right to live happily. He does not find any words in the library that would advocate his position. He confesses, “The more I read, the more wretched my life became” (138). After realising that he made the student die because of his wrong values, he develops a greater guilty conscience. He begins to depend on heavy drinking every night, and finally he is drowned.

The suicide method in *I Need a Vacation* is drowning. The hero throws himself into the sea, just as the female student was killed. It can be said that he has read books in anguish for ten years to find a reason why he should throw himself into the ocean. He might have

been in training to become strong enough to inhale so much plankton in his lungs. In other words, he has been trained to swallow the same amount of water as the female student was forced to swallow in a bathtub ten years ago (142). Thus, he has chosen to drown by, “drifting on the water belly down and arms and legs splayed out” (141).

In this novel, people react to the suicide of the old man in shock and in remorse. His son has been searching for his father, who disappeared when he was in the 11<sup>th</sup> grade. He could not understand why his father had left the home without saying a word to his family. He becomes remorseful to find in the lonely room the beige jumper that his mother had bought for her husband. Mr. Kang, the librarian, who built intimate relationships with him as he came to know his past and comforted him, is shocked at his suicide and thinks that he needs a vacation.

The meaning of *I Need a Vacation* lies in dealing with a sense of guilt on the part of a person who acted as a tool of the government, in so doing implying that it is not easy to treat a trauma hanging over one’s life. The story is about an old man who lived through a miserable period of military dictatorship, and shows how an ex-detective who played as a tool of the government comes to realise his own identity in the midst of a guilty conscience. As a way of atonement, he gives up his life in the same way as he killed the female student.

To summarise, there are novels that deal with elderly suicide in the light of the ills of the consumption culture. In the mid-2000s and hereafter, Korea faced social polarisation, the collapse of the middle class, and unequal relations between classes. The weak had to be driven by adverse circumstances. Instead of actively resisting against marginalisation, however, they passively accepted those circumstances as a given in lethargic self-defence and self-consolation. *Winter Cactus* of Table 6-1 depicts how the heroine is despised by her sons and daughters, is drawn to the culture of consumption that provides self-consolation, and makes up her mind to die by refusing to eat anything after she grasps their thought, which she cannot overcome. In reminiscent of *Sam Island* mentioned above, *I Need a Vacation* of Table 6-2 depicts the hero, who once lived as a tool of the military dictatorship and killed a female student, commits suicide after having lived with a guilty conscience for a long time.

### 3.7 Conclusion

The above analysis demonstrates that elderly people are depicted in Korean novels as committing suicide for specific reasons. Unlike novels dealing with non-elderly suicide, in which the circumstances of the time play an important role in the description of suicide, those novels that deal with elderly suicide regard the circumstances of the time simply as a background.

In novels dealing with non-elderly suicide, characters commit suicide after suffering conflicts between self and the world because of the special situations of each generation. For example, the period from the 1900s to the 1910s is seen as a period of literary boom. In this period, heroes or heroines of novels that deal with non-elderly suicide, commit suicide because of conflicts between concubines, concubinage and, men's betrayal for example. Most of the characters who commit suicide are female (Lee Kwanglin, 1988). This may well symbolise a move from the past ethics of Confucianism, which demanded obedience and fidelity from women, toward a modern focus on love.

Suicide is committed for similar reasons in the 1920s. Women are rarely controlled by the traditional ethic that subordinates women to one husband; instead, they commit suicide in order to justify their forbidden love. Novels deal with sexual motives for suicide, including sexual abuse, suspected in fidelity, prenatal pregnancy, prostitution, and misunderstanding. In comparison to the novels in the 1910s, however, there appear several complex novels that link the greed of capitalism with sexuality. This reflects a social contradiction of the time: because of the emergence of a small number of pro-Japanese landlords and capitalists, wealth distributions are concentrated on a small number of people. In the 1920s, the number of male suicides is almost the same as the number of female suicides.

Novels written from the 1930s to the 1940s reflect the situation of Japanese colonialism. Suicide is not only an outcome of despair but also a strong way of resisting colonialism. Therefore, motives for suicide include loss of homeland due to Japanese colonialism, personal or national anger over Japanese colonial rule, self-division on the part of intellectuals. It is noteworthy that internal anxiety is presented as a motive for suicide.

Novels written in the 1950s reflect the Korean War. Motives for suicide involve such positive reasons as yearning for true freedom, nostalgia for one's hometown, and such negative reasons as suffering and lack of hope due to materialism. It is noticeable that some characters are forced to commit suicide.

Novels written in the 1960s reflect Korean society in which a power above the law appears as the result of the 5.16 military coup after the failure of the 4.19 Revolution. When the nation tries to enforce individuals to follow the values of the nation, novel characters commit suicide as a means of resistance. Suicide motives include thirst for freedom due to ideological conflicts between south and north, dissolution of families during the Korean War, materialism, deconstruction of morals, loss of humanity, etc.

Novels in the 1970 reflect Korean society in which people's soul's became devastated despite its economic growth. Novel characters resist the reality of capitalism and commit suicide as a way of exposing the lies of capitalism. Suicide motives include poverty because of industrial capitalism, unfair social structure, the problem of survival for the workers, ideological conflicts between South and North Korea.

Novels written in the 1980s, which is a period of rapid industrial growth, reflects Korean society that treats some people as "less than human." Novel characters commit suicide in order to free fellow workers from isolation and misery. In committing suicide, they not only call attention to social contradictions but also urge fellow workers to join the resistance.

Novels in the 1990s reflect Korean society in which ideologies decline due to the fall of socialism. Suicide motives range from anxiety to disillusion at the end of the century. It is noteworthy that suicide is committed because of depression.

Novels written in the 2000s and thereafter reflect Korean society in which suicide is a well-known social problem. Motives for suicide include fear, inferiority complexes, pressure from the nation, insurance fraud, guilt for broken relationships, inhumane society, lack of truth, etc.

As noted above, the way in which novels dealing with non-elderly suicide handle realities



is not significantly different from the way in which people do in the real world. While suicide motives in novels dealing with non-elderly suicide reflect contemporary society, suicide is largely committed in novels dealing with elderly suicide because of broken family relationships and the problem of ageing.

The most important motive for elderly suicide in novels is broken family relationships. This motive accounts for eight out of nineteen novels considered. This can be further divided into three motives: dispute over inheritance, parents treated as a burden by children, parents despised by daughters-in-law. Old people who have no economic power depend on their children and expect them to be changed. And yet, when their hopes for their children collapse, they can no more endure it and commit suicide in frustration.

Second, elderly people commit suicide in order to escape from the reality of senescence and sickness. This accounts for three out of nineteen novels considered.

Third, elderly people kill themselves because of loneliness. This motive accounts for two novels out of the nineteen considered. Fourth, elderly people committed suicide when they could not overcome traumas related to the Korean War or the Pro-democracy Movement. In two out of nineteen novels, elderly people suffer from a sense of guilt for their wrongdoings and choose suicide as a way of atoning.

Not all novels dealing with elderly suicide view it as a negative phenomenon. A certain novel depicts elderly suicide as helping children to be reconciled to each other. In this novel, a Buddhist belief in reincarnation after death plays a role when an old couple commits suicide with a smile on their faces, with their hands tied by a scarf. When the children see this scene, they are reminded of their parents' love for them and reconciled with each other.

In the 21st century, novels begin to deal with elderly suicide as elderly people experience loneliness and depression, no sense of existence, and lack of hope, as a result of a nuclear family.

In five novels out of the nineteen considered, the friends of the suicide are angry at his or her children because of their double personality. Five novels do not even mention any

reaction to the suicide on the part of his or her acquaintances; instead, they are completely silent in this regard or the author just comments that everything has got back to normal again. This seems to imply that society is indifferent to elderly suicide. Four novels depict family members or children regretting or mourning over the one who committed suicide. In other cases, the friends of the suicide think that he or she did well to commit suicide. A novel describes how the suicide of parents helps their daughter to be reconciled to her husband.

Elderly people commit suicide by taking drugs (in six novels), drowning (in five novels), fasting (in three novels), dying from disease, or gunshot. Likewise, a variety of factors exert influence on the lives of elderly people. They suffer from poverty, alienation, loneliness, depression, no sense of existence and, regrets from their past life. Elderly people become devastated by broken relationships, emptiness of life, loss of health, fear of death, lack of communication and confusion of values in a fast-changing society.

Elderly people can enjoy a peaceful and fruitful senescent period, just as a young tree grows able to offer not only fruit but also branches and leaves for birds. Every person desires to enjoy this peace. By considering the meaning and challenge of a senescent life, we will be able to solve social problems to a certain degree. In addition, by reading novels that deal with elderly suicide, we will be able to avoid committing the same mistakes that our previous generation made. Since everybody gets old, we need to take seriously the problems of old people and devise ways in which we can live a happy life in our spirit, soul, and body. We must tackle the question of how we should live our life, especially our senescent life.

## 4. Listening to the Narratives of My Co-researchers

### 4.1 Introduction: The Reality of the Interview Process

The narrative research is situated within the qualitative research methodology which can be viewed as an interdisciplinary, multi-paradigmatic and multi-method (Struwig, 2001:11). Broadly speaking, qualitative research studies phenomena establish themselves through the intentional and ideal intervention by the subject into the uniqueness of the object (Becker, 1996). In that aspect, narrative research is ontologically based on subjectivism (Patton, 1990; Bogdan and Taylor, 1975) and epistemologically on interpretivism (Krauss, 2005:762-763). Narrative research is more interested in the narratives, the life stories and the life storytellers (Burger, 2014:42). “Narrative research does not have as its purpose the documentation of an objective truth. There are, too, other approaches to research which are probably better suited to documenting such truths. Rather, narrative accounts provide an especially rich insight into subjective truths, the frameworks of meaning by which individuals live their lives.” (406) Narrative research does not listen to what we are expecting but what is new and different (424), in so doing examining any changes and possibilities. The major characteristic of narrative research is to construct, deconstruct, and reconstruct stories. Therefore, narrative research needs to gather information about narratives and interpret the meanings derived from the narratives. It aims to “explore and conceptualize human experiences as it is represented in textual form” (Josselson, 2011:225).

To sum up, both the qualitative research and the narrative research begin with a cyclical dialogue, develop into a theory, and return to practices (Müller, 2004:295); yet, they find meanings and values therein rather than generalise them.

Due to the way in which the truth of the narrative is brought forward by the participant, “it became more and more difficult to regard people as research objects” (Müller & Schoeman, 2004:8). Therefore, phrases such as “co-researchers” or “research participants” are used instead. According to Rubin & Rubin (1995:11), the researcher and co-researcher are treated as partners. Research participants take up a big role in the

narrative research as they give the information that will be analysed in the research. In this relationship between the researcher and the co-researchers, the narrative research methodology is used.

In this frame, the researcher will carry out semi-structured and unstructured in-depth interviews with elderly people, taking note of their stories. “In-depth interviewing allows the researcher to explore complex, contradictory, or counterintuitive matters” (Rubin & Rubin, 2012:4). It shows people’s hidden motives and opinions. “Qualitative interviewers examine the complexity of the real world by exploring multiple perspectives toward an issue” (Rubin & Rubin, 2012:4). This makes in-depth interviewing an appropriate tool for handling sensitive and/or personal topics or morally ambiguous choices people have made.

In-depth interviewing seeks rich and detailed information and examples and stories of experiences. Questions are open-ended and researchers do not put the interviewee into a category so the interviewee can respond in any way possible. Besides, the questions are not fixed so the researcher can change the questions in accord with the interview as it continues.

Through this effort, I intend to understand their experiences in their contexts. Of special importance is the way in which suicide affects the relationships between the co-researches, on the one hand, and their family members and the members of society, on the other hand. Narrative research assumes that people live and understand their lives in a story-like setting, with a beginning, middle, and an end. “These stories are played out in the context of other stories that may include societies, cultures, families, or other intersecting plotlines in a person’s life” (Josselson, 2011:224).

The conversations and discourses in this research are based on the theoretical premise that "people's expressions of life, which are actually shaping or constitutive of their lives, are units of meaning and experience, and these elements are inseparable" (White, 2000:9). The researcher will listen to the co-researchers' conversations and discourses and understand their narrative events and then reconstruct it. In addition, the co-researcher

will be understood in this research through the paradigm of a postmodern context of the conversations and discourses. Postmodern theory stresses the discourse over the language itself. The discourses express the historical specialty of what can be spoken and what should not be spoken. Moreover, Rachel Hare-Mustin (1994:19) defines a discourse as “a system of statement, practices, and institutional structures that share common values.” Freedman & Combs (1996:43) wrote, “Discourses powerfully shape a person’s choices about what life events can be storied and how they should be storied. This is as true for therapists as it is for the people who consult them.”

The aim of this study through a narrative research is to construct and deconstruct the present story by exploring the narratives of life that relate to suicide on the part of Korean elderly people. Researchers should deconstruct each narrative and retell another narrative as the new story of understanding points beyond the local community: or culture (Müller, 2003:293). When using the narrative approach in postfoundational practical theology, the researchers deconstruct any negative discourse – if necessary – and this will happen with a holistic understanding (Burger, 2014:44). In so doing, the researcher attempted to find a new meaning embedded in their narratives and suggest a way in which the co-researchers will be able to use to transform their lives in a satisfactory way. For this purpose, the researcher conducted qualitative interviews with special reference to the three-fold meanings of the personal stories of the interviewees: personal meanings, social meanings, and divine meanings.

This research study is an attempt to investigate the perspectives of Korean elderly people regarding suicide, based on the interviews conducted more than ten times between March 2014 and April 2016 with four people 65 years old and over. In exploring the perspectives of Korean elderly people regarding suicide, the interviews were conducted with a view to understanding the personal narratives of senior citizens and their influence on their lives. Insofar as personal meanings inscribed in their narratives of life are not as understandable and informative they are extremely individual, fresh and real (Kate de Medeiros, 2014:22). In investigating the narratives of Korean old people who have attempted to commit suicide, I found meanings and influences embedded in personal lives. In this regard, chapter 4 is to be regarded as one of the most important findings in this study.

First of all, I formulated research questions concerning the topic of this study, as if to assemble a puzzle. In so doing, I did not employ a positivist research, which chooses a research design and follows it all the way. Instead, I employed a qualitative research design in the sense that my design will be continuous, flexible, and adaptable. In redesigning my research questions, I transformed questions continuously and researched new information and insights in a flexible way, thereby applying them to my research design. In case my questions were found to be too sensitive to conversation partners, I took a step back and reconstructed or adjusted research questions (Rubin, Herbert J, 2012:42-43).

In order to find conversation partners, I participated in a meeting of elderly people in the S. Church, called the Caleb Fellowship, every Saturday for about two months since mid-January 2014. First, I made a personal observation of the participants. In so doing, I built good trust relations with them, with a view to laying a foundation on which to understand their lives not from the perspective of a researcher but from the perspective of an elderly person as a subject of one's own life. In doing so, I also tried to find co-researchers for this study. In order to keep a balance in the findings of the study, I took into consideration their faith and intellect levels. I could find an elder who was working as a social worker after retiring as town mayor, and a layman who was living alone, wearing a cardiac pacemaker. In the case of women, I found a deaconess who had graduated from a college of pharmacy and had run a pharmacy, and a laywoman who had never gone to school and was living with her married son. The reason why I considered the intellect level of the interviewee in order to keep a balance in the study was because it would make my study richer than when I interview only people of one level of intellect. This approach also helped to better understand the complexity and diversity of the world as they are reflected in the differences between interviewees. I also considered their roles within the church, because it enabled me to investigate different opinions according to their faith level.

After choosing the conversation partners, I revealed myself as a pastoral counsellor and my intention to listen to their opinions about elderly suicide, an important issue in Korean society. I informed them of my plan to visit them every Saturday for about one hour. The researcher honestly let them know every possible thing that might happen at any phase of the research. The researcher also told them that he would take into consideration the

personal situations of every interviewee. They were informed that they could take enough time answering questions, and speak as slowly as possible, so that they might not feel uncomfortable. In advance, the researcher let the interviewees know that they could avoid a long interview and stop at any moment. The researcher also told them that he would listen to them and cooperate with them, in case they were resistant against or nervous about having an interview tape recorded.

The interviews were conducted in a café near the church, a counselling room of the church, or a counselling room of a community welfare centre. After revealing his identity, the researcher clarified his intention to listen to their opinions regarding elderly suicide, an important issue in Korean society, and the way in which elderly suicide was dealt with in the newspapers and, suicide notes for instance.

Last but not least, the researcher will conduct semi-structured interviews with the same questions concerning a suicide note left by an old person who lived and died alone, and two newspaper accounts that deal with family suicide. The researcher will make sure that the interviews do not deviate from the topic of the study by having the questions and follow-up questions prepared. Open questions will be used so that the interviewees may answer in their own way. One newspaper account deals with a family suicide which was committed by parents who killed their children, another newspaper report handles a family suicide committed by a son who killed his parents. For two reasons, I held qualitative interviews with the co-researchers concerning a suicide note and two newspaper accounts. First, the interviewees are reluctant to talk directly about the suicide of their family members because they still cannot easily accept the fact. In this case, suicide notes and newspaper accounts act like a filter to interview participants. By means of the characters that appear in suicide notes or newspaper accounts, the interviewer is able to listen to the voices of the interview participants who can speak out in the absence of any defence mechanism. In other words, interview participants talk about and give their own interpretation of the characters in suicide notes and newspaper accounts. In so doing, they came to talk about their own personal experiences in a more comfortable manner.

Second, due to their strong images, suicide notes and newspaper accounts are easily

remembered and reminiscent of the realities in a real manner. As they read suicide notes or newspaper accounts, interview participants will be able to expand their original thoughts and recall those memories needed for the construction of their own myths. To sum up, narrative gerontology helped one to better understand, explain, and predict the thoughts and acts of elderly people by using their narratives, and to use the results to foreground the issue of elderly suicide in Korean society and suggest ways in which to help them to recover from pain, trauma, and frustration.

## **4.2 The First Co-researcher's Story**

Ethical considerations play an important role in the narrative research, which describes the private life and experiences of the co-researcher. The researcher explained the intent and method of the research in detail to the co-researchers, in order to protect their ethical rights. I made it clear that their private stories will remain anonymous and confidential. Since suicide is an ethically delicate issue, the researcher conducted interviews with special reference to some ethical considerations. First, the researcher used open questions rather than structured questions, in order to make the co-researchers feel comfortable and avoid speaking about their painful experiences relating to suicide. Second, the researcher made it clear that the contents of the interview would be used only for academic purposes and that a fictitious last name will be used instead of their real names. Third, the researcher himself recorded the interviews with the co-researchers.

### **4.2.1 Stories of Now and Then**

Woo was born in 1942. At the age of 74, she is currently living with her first son. The other son is living independently. She studied pharmacology in college and worked as a pharmacist after graduation. In 1969, she got married at the age of 27. But her husband died of cancer ten years later, leaving behind a 6-year-old son and a 5-year-old son. She ran a pharmacy in Busan for about 20 years. When she was 52 years-old, her sons went to college in Seoul, and she moved in 1990 to Pochun, Kyunghi-Do, in order to live near them. She ran a pharmacy there for 13 years. When she was 65 years-old in 2007, she began to wonder what kind of lives other people were living and changed her occupations



several times until 2013. She worked in a small hospital and a university hospital, at a small pharmacy and a large pharmacy, and at a sanatorium. She retired in 2013 and took part in the counselling course offered in the S. Church in 2014. She caused some trouble as she behaved in a weird manner: she asked abrupt questions in class and often scolded other students.

I was introduced to Professor O. who was teaching a course in counselling in the S. Church. After informing him of my research topic, I asked him whether he knew anyone who could be an interviewee for my research, preferably an intellectual person who was 65 years old or above, who had experienced a suicide death in the family and held an ecclesiastical office. He recommended Woo, saying that her younger sister committed suicide and she herself attempted suicide and that she was an intellectual deaconess.

#### **4.2.2 Depicting Her Identity Narrative: “I Was Born Under an Unlucky Star.”**

I met her at the church café on April 4, 2014. At first, she looked very gloomy. She avoided making eye contact with me and kept looking down at the floor. This is the very first sentence she uttered: “I was born under an unlucky star.” When she was two years old, her father became ill and she was sent to her grandmother’s home, where she was raised until she was seven years old. She calls her mother “woman,” because she thinks that she has never been loved by her mother. When she was nine years old, her father passed away. When she was a freshman, not only did her mother pass away but her brother failed in his business. While she went to college, she used to wonder, “Where should I go tonight.” It was about this time that she felt suicidal. She was surrounded by the death of four people. When she was a fourth-grader, one of her aunts who especially loved her, committed suicide; one of her teachers in charge at her elementary school, for whom she felt reverence, committed suicide; her beloved boyfriend also killed himself; and her younger sister committed suicide. She said, “As my beloved people committed suicide, I came to think that I also may have to kill myself.”

R: So you accepted suicide as a part of your fate. How did you survive the second attempted suicide? You could have taken a lethal dose, since you were running a pharmacy.

C1: It happened that I was miraculously found by someone who knew some medical techniques.

R: You just used the word “miraculously.” Do you think that it was a miracle that you did not die but survived an attempted suicide? Who do you think would be most pleased with the fact that you survived?

C1: It should be my children.

R: Under which circumstances did you find yourself easily overcoming your suicidal impulses?

C1: When my husband died, I thought that there would be no more escape. If I collapsed, everything would collapse. I was devoted to running a pharmacy. However, I was so busy running the pharmacy that I could not even dine with my children. I had no time to sit on a chair to eat. Accordingly, I could not find opportunities to show my love for them. I feel very sorry for them in this regard.

R: When you uttered the expression “under an unlucky star,” it should mean something related to the way in which you brought up your children.

C1: You are right. After having done my best to raise my children, I just realised that I had not been a good mother to them. My eldest son, who is a psychiatrist, got divorced after begetting a daughter. My second son is over 40 years old and is not married yet. Both of them are living alone, though they are all tall and handsome. It makes me irritated and angry. I thought that I was a successful mother and my children were growing up well. But when I suddenly realised that it was not the case, it simply broke my heart. I failed in educating my beloved children, despite my best efforts.

#### **4.2.2.1 Reflection**

As she was born in 1942, Woo had to undergo such difficult periods as Japanese colonialism and the Korean War, which broke out in 1950. After having lived through such harsh days, she concluded that she was born under an unlucky star. I paid attention

to the expression “born under an unlucky star” that she used, in the hope that I might be able to elicit further discussions by knowing its meaning as it is used by her. Her adverse fortune may be divided into three stages. First, she felt in her childhood as if she had been abandoned by her mother when she was raised by her grandmother because of her father’s illness. In addition, it seems that she felt hurt when she came back home to go to school by the fact that her parents loved her younger brothers and sisters more than her. Moreover, she presumably experienced trauma as she had to hear her father groaning in pain. In her childhood, she felt as if she had been discarded by her uncaring mother and her father who had died young. Second, as those who had loved her committed suicide during her adolescence, she came to regard suicide as part of her destiny. Third, she attempted suicide while she was suffering postpartum depression. It turned out that the lives of her sons, to whom she had devoted her life since her husband had died when she was 38 years old, were not successful. Throughout her life, she had some reason to think that she was an unhappy woman because she had been born under an unlucky star.

In her narrative of life, Woo defines her life as an instance of adverse fortune, thereby believing that she has lived an unhappy life. Thus her unfortunate life is closely related to her abandoned life, suicide, and death. In my view, her belief that she was born under an unlucky star has something to do with the suicide and death of her close acquaintances, and this belief was further corroborated by her sons’ rather unsuccessful lives. Nevertheless, I find some positive sign in her thinking as she regards her surviving an attempted suicide as a kind of miracle, though she deeply deplores her adverse fortune. I formulated the story- development through questions by using that point as a preference question.

#### **4.2.3. Her Narrative About Her Family and Others: “I Am Scared to Look at Mom.”**

As she studied counselling in the church, Woo was surprised to realise that the facial expression of her son is almost the same as her own facial expression. She once disputed with her eldest son over inheritance. Since then, she has never heard her son speaking well of her. Whenever she did something wrong, he used to say to her, “I am afraid of you.” She was shocked when he said that he had studied hard not because he loved to study but because he had been afraid of his mother. Likewise, her second son used to say

that he had been disappointed at the fact that she did not love him as much as she loved her eldest son. Woo just swallowed her anger saying to herself, “You will never know how much I have sacrificed myself for you.” She was once satisfied by her belief that she was a successful mother to her sons. As it turned out she was mistaken, she could not but feel a sense of futility and anger, even during the counselling class.

R: But strangely enough, you look peaceful. What happened to you since we started this interview six months ago?

C1: Is that so? That is a miracle. Six months ago, I was restless, nervous, and angry because of my son’s marriage. These days I never talk about their marriage. Instead, I said that I was sorry because I had not been a good mother when you needed me. I also said that I really appreciated the opportunities to go to the movies and dine out with them, which might have been impossible had they been married. I think I will employ a 60-year-old housekeeper, if they do not get married.

R: You have been changed remarkably. What made you think that way?

C1: I read a book about counselling, which was recommended by the counselling professor. As I read the book, I realised that I was treating my sons as if they were my belongings. I felt guilty that I was only criticising my children. Besides, as I came to know myself better, I realised that I never thought that not only others but also I might have been wrong. In one word, I did not consider the feelings of my dearest sons. It was predictable that my sons felt the same way as I did: I felt not only comfortable but also uncomfortable with them. I was not only glad but also sad for them. I should have known that their feelings likewise fluctuated. I was not considerate enough.

R: What did you learn about yourself from the book on counselling which you had read?

C1: I used to think that the fault lies with other people, not with me. But now I realize that I was to blame. When I tried to wonder why they had behaved and spoken in that manner, I was able to understand them.

R: In what specific respects did you realise that you are to blame, not others? Do you

mind if I ask you to share that story with me?

C1: I was treating my children as if they belonged to me. As long as they were independent, they just obeyed me. When they turned twenty, I could read their dissatisfaction from their faces. As they found their own selves, they were able to criticise my behaviour. Whereas they could not oppose my words, their dissatisfaction appeared on their faces. Now I realise that I did not respect their personality but instead I tried to control them as if they were my belonging.

R: What have you done after you came to know yourself?

C1: I apologised to my second son. I asked him to forgive me for having treated him as if he were my soldier, who I thought must obey me insofar as my values were better than his. “That’s OK,” he said. He also tried to comfort me by saying that he understood that I had been through hard times and that not only I but also other parents in those days had been likewise dominating. I asked him to understand that I had married not knowing what it meant to be a mother.

Once I talked to him:

“Now I can see that you are good-natured. You are not selfish. That’s why you enjoy peace of mind. Everybody has a right to decide his or her own lifestyle and to live according to his or her natural personality. I was ambitious and wanted to succeed. That’s why I frequently rebuked you, saying “you are not even worthy to be called a man.” Now I know that I was wrong. In fact, I had to learn something from you, who chose to live your own life.”

R: I wonder if you see any sign of hope in your conversation with your children.

C1: Yes, of course. My second son often calls out “Mom” and looks and smiles at me.

R: Can you tell me any change in your perspective of your sons?

C1: I have realised that children can never be one’s belongings. They are individual souls,

who were born through my body. It is God who creates children in my body. In God's view, children as well as mothers are equally precious souls. But the souls of my children cannot be my soul. These days I often think that even though they choose a life with which I am not pleased, there is nothing I can do about it. I have to respect their own decisions.

R: Does it mean that you have changed your view of their marriage?

C1: I used to think that they must get married. But now I say to them that marriage is a result of compromise and so they need to learn to build good relations before getting married. I said to them that marriage should be based not only on emotions but also on trust, integrity, and honesty. I told them that they would meet with good spouses sooner or later, if they were ready in this regard. Parents can give birth to children, but they must come to maturity on their own. I did all I could for you. I will live my own life, and so you live your own lives. Recently I never talk about their marriage.

When she decided to live her own life and tried to look at everything with her loving eyes and to be considerate to others, she began to see the merits of her children, who began to change for the better. She says that she is often surprised to find some warmth in her second son. Significantly, she adds that she appreciates that she has lived as a pharmacist.

#### **4.2.3.1 Reflection**

Woo was once in despair because of her communication problems with her children. But as the interviews proceeded and she studied counselling, she became more self-conscious and self-confident, recovering her identity. By recalling her past life, she managed to reconstruct some events in the past. Through self-reflection, she could take the first step and develop a new story.

In recalling her past life, Woo gave special meaning to her failure to embrace some of her beloved people because of her career success. She tried to understand what made her children like that and why they looked so gloomy. Her memories played an important role in this regard. In recalling some past events, she tried to interpret them in a new way.

I think her attempt to do some research on her past life made her change her perspective and understanding.

Through the interviews, Woo contextualised her memories and changed her perspective. She integrated her past observations and experiences into something relational according to her perspective. She said that she felt guilty for not having spent enough time with her children and appreciated the fact that she could spend some time with them because they were not married yet. She escaped from the framework of master cultural narratives, by which she had been constrained. In my view, she could overcome the general cultural narrative, which stipulated that men should get married, because she was changed as she studied counselling, at the same time participating in the interviews.

I think the most remarkable miracle that happened during the interviews was that she realised that she was a unique person. She could find her identity when she realised who she was by looking at some parts of her past life. She has decided to live her own life once she accepted that her life and the lives of her children are distinct. This change of perspective enabled her to admit that her children have a right to live their own lives, whether she likes them or not, and so respect their lives as such. I think it is significant in Korean culture that a woman in her seventies declares that she will live her own life. Thus, she is constructing her own identity by reconstructing her previous life.

#### **4.2.4 Her Narrative About Her Relationship With God: “I Have a Noble Mind.”**

When Woo worked as a pharmacist, pharmacies were quasi-hospitals, as it were, because there were not many hospitals. She remembers some good moments. At night, she sometimes saved the lives of those who had breathed gases from burning coal briquettes by giving them medication. Even on Sundays she had to take care of the patients who were waiting in front of the pharmacy. In an interview she said that her pharmacy was not only a means of making enough money to raise her two sons but also a place to save people’s lives.

When her husband died, Woo felt a suicidal urge. But she could overcome that crisis by looking at her sons. “I must not freeze on this frozen soil. What will become of my two

sons without me? All I have to do is just raise them well. I must not die but come up from this frozen ground.” She prayed to God to help her to overcome those difficulties.

Woo’s strength also derived from her reading. Reading has enabled her at difficult times to make correct decisions. She had neither parents nor friends. And yet, she could gain wisdom from reading at critical moments. Even after retirement, she reads a couple of books every month. In the final analysis, it is her children and reading that enabled her to stand up again from the frozen soil. Reading also changed her life and perspective. She says, “I have lived a difficult life, and I have a noble mind.”

Woo says that she feels poor in mind. As she is poor in mind, she is more attracted to what is written in books. When she was not on good terms with her children, she realised that she could not be happy unless she had good relations with them. Therefore, she started to read books dealing with human relations, and sometimes she thought about death through reading. She believes that this world is not the end. Human beings are born empty-handed and die empty-handed, but their souls leave while their bodies remain on earth.

She once read a book, according to which there is a place to which souls go. She believes in an afterlife, i.e., paradise, and so she thinks that she should not live at random in this world. Insofar as this life is not the end but a path to another world, she must live with integrity until she dies. She decides not to be an insensible mother to her children, even when she becomes older.

Woo says that the change of nature, including blossoming and autumn-tinted mountains, is more wonderful than the dead body becoming part of the earth. When she looks at the nature which the Creator created, she feels humble at the sight of mysterious things, which transcend human thought.

R: Do you think you have changed since we started these interviews?

C1: I’ve got a general picture of the kind of life I am supposed to live. I would like to spend 70 percent of my time on those things which need me and 30 percent on religious activities, reading, and watching plays, musicals, and paintings. Let’s see. There is one



good thing that my sons are not yet married. We frequently dine out and watch a movie or a musical together. When they will be married, they will not do so with me. It is not always bad to have single sons.

#### **4.2.4.1 Reflection**

Through the interviews I discovered that ageing means the change of her position with herself. She has moved from the macro-narrative, which controlled her unlucky life, to the micro-narrative, which informs her noble personality. She has escaped from her painful memories of the past and reconstructed the meaning of death from the perspective of the author of the book she read. In so doing, she considers herself to be a noble person who reads books. One of the most important findings from the interviews with Woo is that reading makes her happier now than when she was a high school student, because she feels poor in mind and can better understand the contents of a book. She says that she came to meditate on getting old and dying while she read books. She now believes that although one's body is buried in the ground, his or her soul heads toward heaven. As she considered the change of nature, she came to realise some mysterious things such as the existence of the Creator and his providence. As the interviews proceeded, she became positive enough to be able to define her mind as a noble one, although she had experienced adverse life events. I had the impression that she was entering into a new world as she made use of her knowledge derived from reading books. That change was a certain ontological achievement. In associating reading with the context of nature, she has found the great mystery of the Creator, which is beyond human understanding. In one word, she places her reading, nature, and her faith in the providence of God.

She used to think that she as a pharmacist had not done anything meaningful except that she had raised her children. During the interviews, however, she realised that she had saved the lives of many people dying from carbon monoxide poisoning. In other words, being informed by reading she gave voice to her identity by redefining her career life as noble as any other careers. Consequently, she came to recall those precious moments when she had been comforted by her children, in the light of the fact that she had sacrificed her life to raise them. To sum up, I have watched her deconstruct negative narrative threads (Bury, 1982) and establish an alternative narrative by modifying and

reconstructing stories. She is entering into a new context in which she is able to live her own life instead of being obsessed with her unlucky fate.

#### **4.2.5 After Reading a Suicide Note (See Appendix 1): “Psychological Background Needs to be Changed.”**

Summary of the suicide note: A 67-year-old man, who had high blood pressure, committed suicide because he wanted to die with dignity instead of an unsightly death. He asked his wife, daughter, son, brother-in-law, and sister-in-law to tell the villagers that he died of a heart attack.

Question 1: What did the suicide note make you think?

Answer: I do not understand why he chose suicide, because he was not suffering from a serious disease. It is a selfish act, insofar as he did not give due consideration to the self-esteem of his family members. The most serious problem with the old man who killed himself is that he failed to consider the fact that his family members and relatives would be uncomfortable with his suicide. As a matter of fact, I was also suffering from postpartum depression and felt a suicidal urge. Now I can tell that I was thinking of myself, not of my family members. After my younger sister committed suicide, I have felt guilty for the rest of my life. A suicidal urge is a kind of disease. We must not commit suicide, because our family members will be incurably hurt. We must continue to live no matter how wretched our life becomes. We must accept the truth that we are getting old and are becoming uglier. As long as we were born to live, we must endure and live.

Question 2: What would you have told the person who committed suicide?

Answer: I would say to him that he must study in order to fix his psychological background. People kill themselves because they do not know how to live. To live is to endure. We must endure even our physical suffering. All we must do is just do what we can do. If we cannot walk, we can move our arms. If we cannot move our arms, we can breathe. We must accept who we are. The best way to live a life is to realise that the circumstances rarely change. Instead of trying to change the circumstances, we must be changed ourselves.

R: You mean that it is important to change one's psychological background. In what ways will the change of your psychological background affect your life in the present and in the future?

C1: To live is to win continually. I think I have lived a victorious life. To commit suicide is an irresponsible act, because it passes the buck to other people. Suicide is a way of evading the problem. I could stand up from the frozen soil because I did not evade my life problems. Sometimes life becomes ugly. Nowadays I am trying to change my lifestyle. When I was attending the counselling classes, I was rather self-assertive. I was almost an odd woman out. In fact, I was not keeping up with changing values. Besides, I thought I had not done anything for myself. And so I studied counselling, read books, spent time talking with my acquaintances, including deaconesses. Recently, I began to spend time dining out, going to the movies, and taking a walk with my sons. I feel as if I am their girlfriend. It is good to have a divorced son (ha-ha).

#### **4.2.5.1 Reflection**

After reading the suicide note left by a 67-year-old man, she expresses her anger at the fact that despite his concerns about his children and relatives, he requested that his suicide be kept secret. It is a contradiction that he committed suicide while he was reluctant to become a burden to his family, because he was suffering from neither depression nor serious health problems. She rebukes the suicide. He acted in a selfish way, not considering the trauma his family would experience. His suicide is not a noble act but an irresponsible evasion of life because he made a hasty conclusion that his family would not bear with his illness.

During the interview, I found her more infuriated than before. I think that was because she was still experiencing aftershocks of the suicide of her younger sister. She wanted to tell the old man who had left the suicide note the following story. Death as well as birth is beyond our control. Insofar as we were born, we have to endure and live to the end. This is life. According to her, many people hesitate between life instinct and death instinct. They can make a right decision by making up their minds to endure. I agree with her that insofar as we were born, we have to live through disgraceful situations, accept

the fact that we grow old and become ugly, and endure to the end.

Woo also points out that the most important thing for a person who feels like committing suicide is to have someone to talk to nearby. In her opinion, suicide can be prevented only when his or her psychological background is treated.

Woo cites her experience as instance. When she was suffering from severe depression after retirement because of her son's marriage, she tried to change her lifestyle. She began to realise the importance of human relations. After realising that she had done nothing for herself in the past, she began to read books and study counselling. As a result, she came to the conclusion that it is important to teach a person who feels a suicidal urge how to overcome such a crisis. She constructed her alternative narrative. In other words, she developed her own philosophy. To live is to endure. Let's just do the things I can do. If I can't walk, I can move my arms. If I cannot move my arms, I still can breathe. I can accept myself as it is and do what I can do. At the end of the interviews, she concludes that elderly life is nothing other than a series of winning.

#### **4.2.6. After Reading a Newspaper Article About a Familicide Involving Old Persons (See Appendix 2): "Suicide Is a Most Terrible Thing."**

Summary of the newspaper article: Mr. Park, father of a Korea Wave star, Leeteuk, hanged himself after strangling his father, who was 84 years old, and his mother, who was 79 years old, both of whom were suffering dementia to such an extent that they were hard to care for. It happened the night before they would be sent to a sanatorium. Not only was his family suffering economic distress, but Mr. Park was also suffering from depression.

Question 1: What were you thinking about after reading this article?

Answer: I think Mr. Park made a wrong decision. It is a very tragic incident, though he did so because of his depression

Question 2: What would you have told the person who committed suicide?

Answer: Suicide is a most terrible thing. You should think of the disappointment and frustration your son will undergo. Your son has become a superstar and your economic distress will be soon solved when he is discharged from military duty. I feel suffocated to see you trying to put an end to your life.

Question 3: Was the article helpful for reconstructing your identity and building your soul?

Answer: Now I think it is necessary to prepare for death. I think I have knowledge of the afterlife. But I still need to study further.

#### **4.2.6.1 Reflection**

Woo said that she was very sorry to read the newspaper article about the familicide involving old people. Citing her attempted suicide as an instance, she concludes that Mr. Park committed familicide because of his misunderstanding, his mistaken belief that it was an undutiful thing for him to send his parents to a sanatorium. Mr. Park was under the influence of the outdated discourse that regarded a sanatorium as a place which people cannot leave alive. I agree with her that it is a reasonable choice for old people suffering from dementia to go to a sanatorium.

Woo would like to give some advice to Mr. Park. “Just think of your son. Imagine how terribly he would feel grief and frustration when he heard that his father killed himself and his grandparents as well.” She wishes she could have prevented Mr. Park from putting an end to his life because of economic distress, which would soon be solved when his son was discharged from military duty. She does not understand Mr. Park on this point. I also think that it would be difficult for his son to accept the familicide committed by his father. It would be painful for a superstar to see his family affair exposed to public shame. In fact, it was not his fault.

#### **4.2.7. Relationships Between the Interviews About Elderly Suicide and *Inheritance*, a Novel Dealing With Elderly Suicide**

One of the strengths of the narrative research is that it can use of a variety of data. I would like to consider perspectives on suicide by comparing my interviews with Woo with *Inheritance*, a novel dealing with elderly suicide. Woo once attempted suicide, but she now declares that suicide must be avoided under any circumstances. She believes that we must endure and live no matter what happens to us. We must not commit suicide, which makes the bereaved live in guilt. Because of this conviction, she can live a happy life, despite her attempted suicide and previous desperate life.

In *Inheritance*, “I” and my wife, who were about to divorce, are reconciled after visiting the place where my parents-in-law committed suicide. We are deeply moved by the way in which they killed themselves: they jumped off a steep cliff, with their wrists tied by a scarf. In this novel, my father-in-law chose suicide as a means of reaching his goal in the afterlife, because he believed in the Buddhist concept of reincarnation after death. To my father-in-law, suicide meant a move beyond the barrier of the reality into a state of rest. Therefore, my parents-in-law gave no consideration to the wound that their family would experience after they committed suicide.

When they jumped off the steep cliff, they tied their wrists with a scarf in the hope that they would live together in the next world. Their daughter and son-in-law interpret this behaviour as revealing their true love. Moved by this suicide, they overcome their conflicts, promised to love each other for ever, and hug each other.

*Inheritance* views suicide from a positive perspective, insofar as the suicide of their parents teaches their daughter and son-in-law a lesson. However, Woo is convinced that suicide must be avoided at any event because it makes the bereaved family live in guilt. I am inclined to believe that suicide cannot be beautified under any circumstances as in *Inheritance*.

### **4.3. Second Co-researcher's Story**

#### **4. 3. 1 Stories of Now and Then**

The second co-researcher was born in 1926 and she is 91 years old by Korean age reckoning. She has two sons and two daughters. Her first daughter and first son were born in 1946 (at 70 years) and in 1950 (at 66 years), respectively, and her second daughter and second son were born in 1959 (at 57 years) and in 1961 (at 55 years), respectively. She never went to school, but she learned to read by watching others. She is the only person in the family who goes to church since she was 16 years old. She got married when she was 18 years old in order to avoid military conscription under Japanese colonial rule. But she could not even spend her wedding night, because her husband was conscripted into the Japanese army. Her husband died in battle and she got married again at age 19. She helped her husband with farm work and she made money. But her husband killed himself by taking an agricultural chemical because of family conflicts in the summer of 1991. It was 25 years ago. After she lived in her hometown alone for a while, her first son began to take care of her in S. city in 2010. But when land prices were increasing in the city of Pochun, there occurred a family conflict between her children over inheritance in 2013. She moved to her second daughter in Pochun. She bequeathed 5000 *pyeong* of land to her second son and began to live with him in 2014. She began to go to the Seniors Welfare Centre in the vicinity of her second son's house. She spends time in the Seniors Welfare Centre from nine in the morning until three in the afternoon and comes back to her second son's house. But she cannot get along with other old people there, many of whom are suffering from dementia.

A pastor of the S. Church introduced Gee to me. I had asked the pastor to recommend a person for an interview, one who went to church for a long time but did not seem to be very devout and someone without a high level of education who had a family member who committed suicide. I had met Gee as an interview participant twice and performed a participant observation. At the third meeting, I explained to her my study plans and informed her of my intention to use the interviews for my dissertation. I have since interviewed her eight times since the spring of 2014.

#### **4.3.2. Depicting Her Identity Narrative: “I Have No Worries.”**

I have met her twice in the church. Though she was 90 years old, she was 170 centimetres tall and straight, and looked very healthy. At first, I paid a visit to the welfare centre in

order to have an interview with her on March 25, 2014. She had a good memory and had a good command of the Korean language. The first sentence she uttered to me was “I have no worries,” which turned out to be very significant.

Gee’s husband worked so hard that he could buy some land. The price of the land bought at that time increased a lot because of urbanisation plans. Her husband was a bright man. Likewise, her children did well at school, and her three grandchildren are doctors. Not only her children but also her grandchildren are all successful people. She bequeathed 5,000 *pyeong* of land to her second son, and she is now living with him. She has no worries about her present life. She says, “I have nothing left for me. If I were abandoned, what would become of me? I don’t care whether I live or die. There is nothing I can do if I am deserted by my children. I have given them everything I had, and so I have no worries.”

Gee’s relationships with her husband is revealed in her belief that husbands are like heaven, and wives earth. In other words, she believes that women must not control men. She took care of the household of her first son and his wife, who were running a business. While she was living with her second son and her daughter by turns, she did not talk in detail about any difficulties she was undergoing. She often emphatically said that she must watch her mouth. She says, “I cannot say everything I want to say. I must be silent.”

R: Have you ever experienced any troubles because of what you have said?

C2: Come on, professor. Those wretched old people around me have one thing in common. Old people cannot side with anyone, as if they were in a dilemma. They will be in trouble, if they say as they please. If an old person takes sides, he or she will have a difficult time. I believe that I should always abstain from speaking out. Even though I am sick, I do not tell anybody that I am sick.

After my husband died, I lived by farming alone. When I got old, my first son asked me to live with him. I took care of his household, cooking and doing the laundry. He and his wife used to go to work at four in the morning. I was sorry for them, because they worked so hard. Then I moved to the house of my second daughter. After several years, I again



moved to the house of my second son, with whom I am currently living.

Men should have guts, and women should show fidelity. I have to endure even amidst difficult times. Women should not speak out at any rate. If I am deserted here, I have no place to go. I have given everything I had to my second son (She sighs).

R: Yes, Ma'am. I understand. Why do you think that men should have guts, while women should show fidelity?

C2: Because they have economic rights, men can behave with boldness. But women have no economic rights, so they have to suffer patiently. Women should be able to know when they can speak out. If I speak as often as I please, there will be disputes among my children.

R: In what ways can you affect your children by speaking prudently?

C2: Whenever people live together, they will experience both good and bad feelings toward each other. If I speak one thing here and speak another there, it will hurt my children and lead to a dispute between them. If I develop a bad feeling toward somebody, I may well want to talk about it. But I have to suppress such a feeling in order to make my children live in peace with each other.

R: You are very wise.

#### **4.3.2.1. Reflection**

I was considering the possibility that Gee's story was influenced by the master cultural narrative of son preference. She says that wives should not dominate husbands because the former is earth and the latter heaven. During the interviews, she repeatedly said, "I have to take some secrets to the grave," "Even when I am sick, I do not let anyone know it.," and "I must not speak anything which will cause a dispute among my children, because I have no economic rights." This is a discourse that confirms that she is under the idea of predominance of men over women. This is also indicated by the fact that while she points out that her grandsons go to medical college, she never says anything regarding her granddaughters. Moreover, while she is staying with her second son, she is not

reluctant to express her special affection for her first son. This seems to reflect her preference of son under the influence of the traditional system that ensured the authority of the eldest son. At the same time, she repeatedly said during the interviews that she had no worries and that she could die at any moment. I see some contradiction in her in this regard.

In the end, I decided to explore hidden voices from Gee. Through an interview with her daughter, I have found out that her husband was faithful to the cultural tradition of ancestors worship to such an extent that even though he was not the eldest grandson of the head family, he bought land for the family gravesite. But he experienced conflicts with his wife and children because of that purchase. The night that his son moved to Seoul, he killed himself by taking an agricultural chemical. Later on, the price of that gravesite rocketed because the area was urbanised, as a result of which there were disputes over inheritance between her children. Her first son wanted to have the land to himself, but she did not fully support him. Then he expelled his mother from the house. She came to stay with her youngest daughter for several years. She attempted to come back to her first son's house, saying that it was the place in which she must die, but she was refused admittance and came back to her youngest daughter's house. Still she believed that she must die at one of her sons' houses and gave 5000 *pyeong* of land to her second son, which was all she had, and moved to his house. It was then that she began to spend time at the Seniors Welfare Centre. However, she did not get along well with other people. Seeing from her statement that she would have no place to go were she to be abandoned by her second son, I thought that she was worried about her abode. The interviews made me realise how deeply she was influenced by Confucian traditions. Her saying that she had no worries also made me feel her reluctance to cause her children any trouble or uncomfortableness out of her sacrificial, maternal love for her children.

As I came to understand how Gee's narrative of her past life is related to her present life, I thought I was getting closer to the reality of her life. She is used to living according to Confucian traditions, which ensure the predominance of men over women and the authority of the eldest son. But she finds the cultural gap between generations to be confusing. That may well be the reason why she behaves in an offensive way towards the other people at the Seniors Welfare Centre. Müller (2001:83) explains the relationship

between the story of now and the story of then, i.e., background story when he says, “We help them place the action against a certain background. The action in the now is played within a background that must be pictured, but this background is alive with associations and connotations of the past.”

#### **4.3.3. Gee's Narrative About Her Family and Others: “Animals Must Have Good Hair Coats.”**

Gee spent her youth amidst a period of chaos and turbulence, in which the most urgent thing was to survive. The Japanese occupation of Korea ended and the Korean War broke out, during which her older brother was shot to death by the North Korean People’s Army. She says that the saying that “animals must have good hair coats, and humans must win the hearts of others” helped her to survive the chaotic period. She acted kindly to her neighbours. Following in the footsteps of her parents, she says, she never denied if anyone asked her to help them with their work, no matter how busy she was.

R: I see. I wonder whether you are willing to help other old people here at the Seniors Welfare Centre.

C2: Most of those who use the Seniors Welfare Centre suffer from dementia. There are a few sane people who can talk to me. If they suffer from dementia, they utter curses so easily. If they curse me, I have to curse them, too. I cannot be a victim. I feel so uncomfortable here. We are like fish in a pond. I feel uncomfortable because we are not on the same page, while we are in the same place.

R: Are there any differences between the way in which you acted to your neighbours in the past and the way in which you act to your fellows at the Seniors Welfare Centre, who suffer from dementia.

C2: I usually do not fight with others. If any friends of mine offend me, I just tell them not to do so. Then, they usually feel sorry and stop. I have been considered a generous person, not a mean person, since I was a kid. But there are five or less sane people here, and so I have to react in a rather offensive way to any offensive words or behaviour in order to protect myself.

R: I see. You mean you offend others in order not to be hurt. Are you satisfied with that lifestyle?

C2: There are 30 old people here. But only several people are sane. The space is so cramped that we run into one another. I wish nobody touched me. When other old people approach me, I spontaneously become offensive.

R: What do you feel, when you utter curses? Have you ever been seen uttering curses?

C2: I do not feel good but my face becomes stiff. I have been seen cursing others by the employees here.

R: How often does your son visit here?

C2: My son often visits here and talks with employees. If I were left to myself, other people would look down on me. It's good to see my son here. I am grateful that I have sons. My second son is very good. He is a good son.

R: Was there any diversion for you recently? Is there anything you especially appreciate?

C2: I say to myself, "I will live happily. I will live happily. I will live happily, learning some sports, drawing some pictures, and sing songs." I eat away my bowl of rice at every meal. I do my best when I do a sport. You see a picture over there. That is my work. I feel good. In particular, I am thankful that I receive old age benefits from the government. Although I don't need to spend much money here, I feel stronger with that money.

#### **4.3.3.1 Reflection**

The act of telling a story may well reveal his or her identity. In recalling the Korean War, Gee talks about how she managed to survive the vicious circle of killing. In reciting the proverb, "Animals must have good hair coats, and humans must win the hearts of others," she says that her father was kind to his neighbours and won their hearts. She tells me that under the influence of her kind father, she never rejected a request for assistance, no matter how busy she was.

However, while she is usually kind to other people, she shows an aggressive personality at the Seniors Welfare Centre. It may be because there are many old people suffering from dementia in the welfare centre. Therefore she curses and attacks others for no specific reasons. She expresses her discomfort by saying, “We are like fish in a pond. But we do not speak the same language, though we are in the same place.”

I tried to investigate the underlying reasons why she was not on good terms with other old people at the welfare centre. I thought she was still suffering the trauma caused by her husband’s suicide, haunted by the memory that her first son once refused her admittance, and was under stress because she endeavoured not to offend her second son and his wife. This seemed to confuse her and so she became emotionally unstable.

Nevertheless, I have the impression that she is recovering her former attitude toward life as she makes up her mind to live a happy life, though there is no solidarity between her children, and so actively participates in all kinds of learning. I think she will be able to perform meaningful communication.

#### **4.3.4 Her Narrative About Her Relationship With God: “Have You Been There, Pastor Moon?”**

Gee had no conviction about the afterlife. She said, “I don’t know what happens to me after death. Sir, you know I would not live like this if I knew what happens after I die. I think that the moment I die, all things end.” Concerning salvation by faith in Jesus, she said that we had to pay some price. Accordingly, her happiness lies in trivial things in daily life rather than in relations with God.

R: Do you believe that the moment you die, all things end? Then, do you think that it does not make any difference whether you commit suicide or you die a natural death?

C2: We must not commit suicide. Suicide is a sin. I heard the pastor preach that we cannot go to heaven if we commit suicide.

R: What makes you think that suicide is a sin?

C2: Our bodies are given by our parents. We were not born in this world because we wanted to. We cannot kill ourselves just because we want to die. We must live until we die a natural death. Besides, we must also think of our family.

R: We must think of the bereaved?

C2: Yes. I think the bereaved cannot completely forget their beloved one who committed suicide. Especially at annual memorial ceremonies, they will sob in pain as they cannot understand why their father or spouse committed suicide.

R: You mean those who commit suicide leave a scar in the heart of the bereaved.

C2: Yes, I think so. Everyone can feel a suicidal urge. There are moments when we feel powerless and feel like committing suicide. But I think we must suffer patiently. If I kill myself, how sad will my children be? If one of my children commits suicide, how sad will I be? I believe that we cannot commit suicide. If I had committed suicide, I would not be meeting you or enjoy this beautiful season. I would not be enjoying any sports, painting, singing, or dancing. I just want to die as if I go to sleep.

R: You said that you don't know what happens after death. You also said that you will go to heaven if you believe in Jesus. Which one do you prefer?

C2: I prefer going to heaven. It reminds me that if we believe in Jesus, we will go to heaven

R: You say that you believe in heaven and that you will go to heaven. Do you have any other expectations in life?

C2: I am glad that I can see my children and grandchildren at holidays, just as I can see flowers bloom in spring. Then I realise that I am alive. I hope they are comforted by the fact that I am alive. If I live long, I hope my children will live long, too. I will be glad to give them the hope that they can live long.

#### **4.3.4.1 Reflection**

Before she got married, Gee began to go to church in order to make friends. She still goes to church for the same purpose. If I ask her any doctrinal questions, she hesitates but soon she manages to answer the questions, since she went to church for about 70 years. I have the impression that Gee is smart but she does not have a strong faith.

And yet, I hoped that I would develop a new story with her, because Gee gave new meaning to glittering events. According to Gee, happiness does not lie in fellowship with God but in trivial things in her life. For example, she was happy when her kids were sitting in the room in clean clothes after a good dinner, when her children came back home after school with the empty lunch boxes in those needy days, when her children received awards in church, and when her children and grandchildren visited her on holidays. As she looks back on those days when she worked hard in agriculture, she finds out that she enjoyed good moments with her children. In addition, she says that we must suppress any suicidal urge because it will leave a scar in the heart of the bereaved. She thinks that it is a sin to commit suicide because she or he wants to die. Here I can see the big scar that the suicide of her husband left in her heart.

Although she has attended church for such a long time, Gee seems to have just shallow and scattered knowledge concerning her relations with the Creator or the afterlife. She can just remember what she has heard about heaven in church. To sum up, I think that she is not sure of her salvation at death but that she is just living based on her family values and practical thoughts. During the last interview, therefore, I talked with her about the afterlife and fundamental doctrines. Finally, I could see her rejoice in the conviction that she would go to heaven at death.

#### **4.3.5 After Reading a Suicide Note (See Appendix 1): “Giving up One’s Life is an Act of Betrayal to God”**

Summary of the suicide note: A 67-year-old man, who had high blood pressure, committed suicide because he wanted to die with dignity instead of an unsightly death. He asked his wife, daughter, son, brother-in-law, and sister-in-law to tell the villagers that he died of a heart attack.

Question 1: What do you think after reading the suicide note?

Answer: Suicide is a stupid act, because when we commit suicide, we betray God and our parents. In particular, when a man dies, his wife is despised by her children. I do not understand why the old man killed himself, while he was on good terms with his family members and relatives. Instead of committing suicide, he should have lived and comforted his wife who was taking care of him, showed a warm and smiling face to his children, and send his best regards to his relatives. All that a sick old person can do is just smile at his or her family members who are taking care of him or her.

Question 2: What would you have told the old man who left the suicide note?

Answer: People will be able to live until they are 120 years old in the future. Why do we need to kill ourselves in our late sixties? We can live 59 years longer. People will live longer and healthier as medical techniques are developing. In a few years, cancers may be no more incurable. Even though we are sick and in pain, we must endure and wait. We must not give up our lives. We should think of our wife and children.

R: Are you usually considerate to other people? Do you feel happy when you help those in need? Are there any things you can do for other old people here?

C2: There are many people here who cannot understand what other people say because they are suffering from dementia. But when they come to themselves, I smile at them. Even though I cannot take care of them, I can respond and react to them. Until now, I have despised those who were aggressive to me, but I will try to be nice to them.

#### **4.3.5.1 Reflection**

After reading the suicide note, Gee says that when we commit suicide, we betray God and our parents. Instead, we must live and encourage our family members who attend us and show them our warm, smiling faces. She wishes she could have told the man who left the suicide note that he must endure and live because his disease would be cured in the future because medical techniques are developing. She says that it is regrettable that



he did not decide to live happily caring for his family with love and that he killed himself while he was not in intolerable pain yet.

Concerning his statement that he would take care of his family after he died, she says that it is more important for him to live and take care of his family. While she is speaking about taking care of someone, she expresses her regret that she has ignored those suffering from dementia or treated them aggressively because they were offensive to her, and makes up her mind to smile at them and respond to them nicely at the Seniors Welfare Centre.

I have the impression that Gee finds the meaning of her life in her attempt to show her sacrifice for and affection toward her first son, though she is not getting along well with him. Interestingly enough, she is more considerate of the painful feelings of the bereaved than of those who commit suicide. At the same time, I suspect that Gee's aggressive attitude toward those who suffer from dementia might come from her fear that she will also suffer from severe dementia just like them. I have come to think so as I listened to her compassionate comment that the old man killed himself in anticipation of worse conditions while he was not very ill. I felt the need to ask her questions to make her feel happier by helping her to express her hidden warm heart, careful concern and sacrifice, endurance and perseverance, and strong affection toward her family.

#### **4.3.6 After Reading a Newspaper Account About Elderly Suicide (See Appendix 3): “Giving up One’s Life is an Act of Betrayal to God”**

Summary of the newspaper account: A woman in her sixties killed her two daughters who had high blood pressure and diabetes and then killed herself. She used to work at a restaurant, but she could not work anymore, because of a cut finger. Then, she committed suicide, leaving a suicide note to her landlord, saying that she had the rent ready.

Question 1: What did the newspaper account make you think?

Answer: That is regrettable. She was not very old in her sixties. Her two daughters were killed by their mother while they were in their thirties. They were too young to die.

Reportedly, her daughters were having diabetes and high blood pressure, but they are not incurable because of developing medical techniques. The familial joint suicide is all the more pitiful because she made a wrong decision. When a person is desperate, he or she becomes blind. The old woman failed to look at the positive side of life instead of the negative one. If she had hoped against all hope, she would not have committed suicide. She could have found some help if she had contacted any welfare centres. It seems that she gave up in desperation.

Question 2: What would you have told the person who committed suicide?

Answer: The most important thing to remember is to stay healthy or keep in good shape. Next, I would encourage her to have good relations with as many people as possible. It is uncomfortable to be in bad relationships with other people. We must use caution in our relations with our children, neighbours, or anyone else. Therefore, reconciliation is important. In good relations, we can cooperate and overcome crises. I am good at healing a breach between friends.

Question 3: Is the newspaper account helpful for reconstructing yourself and soul?

Answer: The older you get, the more often you are tempted to give up your life. It happens even when your children seem to disappoint you. You can say, for example, “I am more than 90 years old, and I do not have many years to live. But no matter what difficult situations I may be facing, I will live a happy life for the rest of my life.” So I am doing anything that will keep me sane. When it becomes dark, I try to remember the faces of my acquaintances, recite the names of my grandchildren, and read the books my son bought for me. The newspaper account is about a woman in her sixties. I have lived 25 years more than she. I am grateful for that, though my life may be tough. As I see people commit suicide, I regard my long life as an addition and so make up my mind to live happily.

R: You regard your long life as an addition. Does that perspective make you feel comfortable?

C2: Yes, it does. Last time you encouraged me to be kind to those suffering dementia

here. I put that into practice. When I saw an old woman who did not chew but just swallow food, I told her to eat slowly. When I saw an old man who did not move, I asked him to do some sports with me. I was sitting and there was an old woman who was passing by. She kicked me, but I just told her to be cautious. I used to ignore those old people who suffered from dementia, but now I try to help them little by little. That makes me happy.

#### **4.3.6.1 Reflection**

At the age of 90, Gee seems to have obtained wisdom and so be able to contemplate life, though she never went to school, because she underwent various experiences in her life. After reading the newspaper account about familial joint suicide, she compares the situations of the suicide with her own situation and comes to the unique conclusion that she will never give up her life, no matter what difficulties may happen to her for the rest of her life. Then she also tries to reconstruct relations with her children and those old people suffering from dementia at the welfare centre, whom she used to avoid. She says that she will take good care of her body in order not to become like one of those suffering from dementia, and that she will overcome any regrettable relations with her children and embrace them with love. She thinks that she has lived 25 years more than the old woman who killed her children and herself, and makes up her mind to live a precious life for the rest of her life. She is no longer aggressive to those suffering dementia and tries to talk to them. In so doing, she seems to regain her original humanity she used to have while she was living in the country when she was young and middle-aged.

Throughout the interviews, she rewrites her life. She begins to get along well with others without conflicts, has a good feeling toward others, and finally becomes a friend to others. She makes a positive comment that we can overcome suicidal urges by cooperating with each other, once we are in good relations with other people. I hope that her life, which she considers an addition, will make small changes around her and help her children and other old people at the welfare centre to live a happy and blessed life.

#### **4.3.7 A Comparison of the Lives of Gee and Her Husband and *A Lotus-persimmon Tree in Jangkok-Ri* and *Death of Old Mr. Park*, Novels Dealing with Elderly Suicide**

The husband of Gee, Ghi-Chool in *A Lotus-persimmon Tree in Jangkok-Ri*, and Mr. Park in *Death of Old Mr. Park* have one thing in common: they come into conflict with their children because of financial problems. Ghi-Chool, who is seventy years old, hangs himself on the useless lotus-persimmon tree in his yard. He commits suicide in desperation because of the government's perfunctory agricultural policies and the dispute between his children over inheritance. He compares himself to the lotus-persimmon tree in his yard. It is not a fruit tree. Because it is not young, it cannot be grafted onto a persimmon tree. It just gathers noisy birds. Ironically, his children dispute over inheritance even at his funeral.

The husband of Gee was also a self-made man. He worked hard and saved enough money to buy land for the family gravesite. Ironically, he came into conflict with his children because of the land and finally committed suicide. As the price of the land increased, Gee's children quarrelled over the division of their father's assets. They are like the children of Ghi-Chool. After her husband died, Gee became like the useless lotus-persimmon tree in Ghi-Chool's yard. She moved between her children's houses, and now lives uncomfortably with her second son, after she bequeathed him 5000 *pyeong* of land, which was all she had.

The situation of Mr. Park in *Death of Old Mr. Park* is similar to that of Gee in that he does not have a good place to live in. Mr. Park is 75 years old and walks on crutches, because he had his foot cut off. He cannot come to the silver hall, after his children got rid of those crutches. After he is expelled by his first son, he lives with other children and then finally he moves to his youngest son. When he comes to his third son and his wife to get an allowance, he overhears them and comes to know the real reason why his children threw his crutches away. He is so shocked that he kills himself.

There is a significant similarity between the lives of Ghi-Chool and Mr. Park, as depicted in novels, and the lives of Gee and her husband in the real world. The lives of these old

people are like the useless lotus-persimmon tree in Ghi-Chool's yard, which has just thick branches. Sick old people have no place to live comfortably. I recall Gee saying habitually "I have no worries" during the interview, presumably for fear that her words might do harm to her children.

#### **4.4 Third Co-researcher's Story**

##### **4.4.1 Stories of Now and Then**

My third co-researcher, Lee, was born in 1938 and is 79 years old by Korean age-reckoning. He is the senior elder and one of the founding members of the S. church. He was a town mayor of Sohul-eup town and now he is a community leader. His father was a paper manufacturer and so he moved many times. He worked in Pochun, Hamkyung-do, and in Heukryonggang, China. During the Korean War, his father was working in Heukryonggang, and when Korea was divided into South and North, he could not return to his hometown, Sohul-eup, which was located in the South. His father lived alone for ten years in Heukryonggang, China, missing his family. Then he got married and begot five children, and he died in the early 1990s.

At age 23, Lee's mother was pregnant with him and gave birth to him at age 24. She gave birth to his older brother at the age of twenty. His father had already died when he was born. His mother was a victim of the Korean War. She became a young widow and lived alone for the rest of her life. Though he was born in Hamkyung-do, he moved to South Korea and was raised by his maternal grandmother in Kapyung. The hardships of life made his mother move to Seoul with his elder brother, where she was hired as a housemaid.

Lee has lived as a witness to Korean history. He experienced such turbulent periods as the Korean War, the Saemaul Movement, and industrialisation. After retirement, he stills works for the local community. He became a Christian at the age of fifteen and worked as a founding member of the S. church. He has been serving the church as an elder for forty years. After having been discharged from military duty, he began his social life as

a public servant at Sohul-eup. He underwent the most severe ordeal in his life when his wife was diagnosed suffering from severe schizophrenia since marriage. She was bedridden after she became pregnant. She was all the more stressed because she was attended by her mother-in-law. Then she began to show symptoms of schizophrenia. She was worse during her pregnancy. Therefore he had difficulties trying to solve discord between his wife and his mother and taking care of his children, in addition to his life at work. Then his relatives and his acquaintances urged him to abandon his wife and get married again. Under such circumstances, he suffered from severe depression and even felt a suicidal urge. Finally he had one year's leave of absence. After that period, he came to realise God's intervention into his life, and he is now serving the church as a retired elder. As father of one son and two daughters, he is also working as a representative of the Solmoru sharing movements.

#### **4.4.2 Depicting His Identity Narrative: "I Eat Someone's Salt."**

The senior pastor of the S. church introduced elder Lee to me. I first met him at the church café on Saturday, April 4, 2014. At first sight, he looked short and thin-faced, and he seemed to be a very upright man. He explained to me about the Caleb Fellowship of the S. church. The Caleb Fellowship is composed of approximately 30 old men going to the S. church and holds a meeting every Saturday. When they meet, they first share the word of God, discuss a prearranged topic, or go to the movies. The church provides them with lunch. The Caleb Fellowship, which is a kind of self-government association, was organised thirteen years ago. There have been a couple of serious difficulties. And yet, thanks to the leadership of Lee, those crises were overcome and the Fellowship persists until now.

According to Lee, the members of the Caleb Fellowship are all veterans, who underwent tough lives. They experienced the Japanese colonialism, the Korean War, the IMF crisis, and so on. They also contributed to the reconstruction of South Korea by playing an important role in the Saemaul Movement. Lee defines them as a generation that made a contribution to the reconstruction of the country, and tells me how they overcame those difficult times.

Lee's childhood life began with the days when he had to live as an unwelcomed guest at his maternal grandmother's house, after his family was separated from his father during the Korean War. Blaming her husband, who did not come back to his family, his mother lived in widowhood for the rest of her life. Seven years ago, he dramatically received news about his father from Heukryonggang, China. He was told that his father had lived alone for 10 years, longing for his family in South Korea. Then he got married and begot five children. He heard that he used to cry whenever he was drunk, until he died in the early 1990s. Lee decided to forgive his father after he was told that he had longed for his family so much. He went to the upper Songwha River, at which his father had been buried, and he cried endlessly.

When he was living with his maternal grandmother, he was so hungry that he became ill when he was eight years old. When he was a first grader at age seven, he could not speak anything at school, because he was punished if he spoke Korean. He could not even afford the tuition and he had to read the teacher's face. He was even beaten. There was not much to eat and he had to live on vegetable porridge. He says that he realised how important it was to have his own country during the Japanese colonialism.

Lee was twelve years old when the Korean War broke out. It was such a tragic war. At night, it used be as bright as day because of bombing. When he woke up in the morning, he could see piles of dead bodies. Numerous refugees were also killed. He could even smell dead bodies. They were harassed by the North Korean People's army at day, and by the South Korean army at night. As a saw moves in both directions, forward and backward, villagers informed against each other if there were any grudges between them, and so many people were killed. They had to read the faces of their neighbours. Many more people were killed because of informer than in battle. At that time, they could not know what would happen in the near future and so they were living in fear.

Lee says that we must call the old people in their seventies and eighties a "Patriotic Generation," because they participated in the Miracle on the Han River after undergoing such difficult periods of time. In addition, he talks about many conflicts he experienced with farmers as a public servant at the town hall, when he tried to educate people about the toilet improvement project and the compost increase project as part of the Saemaul

Movement.

R: What was the most important word to you as you experienced the Japanese colonialism and the Korean War?

C3: I would say, “Tact,” among other things. I ate meals reading the face of my aunt. I studied at school reading the face of Japanese teachers. I also read the faces of my neighbours when they informed against each other. The weak must read the faces of others for survival.

R: While you were growing up, you were hungry and ate someone’s salt. How did that fact affect you?

C3: The truth is that only those who experienced pain can understand pain. I knew that if one is hungry, he or she must read the faces of others. That’s why I started the Solmoru movement after retirement, which is a movement to share one percent of love.

R: What is the Solmoru movement?

C3: I believe that God forced me to initiate this movement. After I overcame a suicidal urge in my fifties, the city hall appointed me as the head of a team that tried to further the benefits of citizens. I was provided with funds and four staff members. I was supposed to help the needy. I felt happier when I went to work than when I left the office. Every day I went out to look around the town and twelve townships to solve problems that the needy people were facing. After I was trained, I turned it into a civilian sharing movement. We benefit from our painful experiences. Whenever I see a hungry person, I take pity. Whenever I see ill persons, I wonder how painful they are and whether or to what extent they eat someone’s salt.

R: How does the Solmoru movement help old people?

C3: The town allows us to use a room in the second floor of the town hall as our headquarters. We provide lunches for old people who are too poor to have lunch. There are old people who come to eat lunch here, because although they live in a good



apartment, they have to read the face of their daughters-in-law to eat lunch. Some volunteers working in the kitchen once complained, “Why do they eat here, while they are rich enough?” Since then, I educated the staff in this regard. I have been running this movement for eight years. After his bankruptcy, an ex-CEO of Dongkuk Steel Company comes here to eat. He eats two or three plates of food.

R: Are there any other instances?

C3: We prevent old people living alone from dying alone. We deliver healthy drinks to senior citizens who live alone and in so doing look after them. We once found a person who had been dead for two months. Nobody knew what happened to him behind the 30-centimetre wall. We deliver yogurt to 80 old people who live alone. When we find two or three bottles of yogurt untouched, we enter the room with the police. By doing so, we recently saved three lives of old people.

R: Pain turns out to be a blessing rather than a curse. Where do you find the meaning of life?

C3: I think the meaning of life is in sharing. For me, pain is like a teacher who taught me to love my neighbours. And so I want to devote the rest of my life to making Pochun a city of sharing. Minutes ago, some section chiefs working in the town hall came to see me. I have suggested to them that we can make Pochun a city of sharing, although there are people who are saying ugly things about the city.

#### **4.4.2.1 Reflection**

I have heard an unbelievable life story from Lee. He spent his childhood and youth amidst existential difficulties as he underwent such turbulent periods as the Japanese colonialism and the Korean War; he was separated from his family, suffered from hunger, and had to read the faces of others. Not only was his father separated from his family, but the other family members were also separated as he was raised at his maternal grandmother’s house. He was even on the point of dying of a disease caused by hunger. At the age of eight, he went to elementary school during Japanese colonialism, and at age twelve he underwent the Korean War. He characterises his childhood by “hunger” and “tact.”

I paid attention to the political power revealed in both Lee's story of a painful life and his strategies against suffering. Lee resisted the identity of the elderly within the master narrative to the effect that old age scores the lowest (Hazan & Raz, 1977; Nelson, 2001). In emphasising the importance of national security and poor relief, Lee regards the older generation as the "Patriotic Generation" or the "Construction Generation," in the sense that they should be credited for the economic reconstruction of Korea. He gives positive meaning to the older generation by calling them the "Construction Generation," thereby departing from the master narrative of loss and decline (Gullette, 2004). He is able to do so because he redefined the meanings of "hunger" and "tact."

Lee's life story is a good example of personal experiences that disappear because they are not told. The Solmoru sharing movement in which he takes part represents a meaningful reconstruction of "hunger" and "tact." Besides, it is a meaningful movement to deliver yogurt to old people who live alone in order to make sure that they are alive. I hope that old people recover their self-esteem, like Lee, instead of being intimidated. I see a controlling theme in his stories. It is his plan to make Pochun, a war-devastated city, into a city of sharing. I hope that his plan, as in the butterfly effect, helps justice to prevail as powerless people help each other.

#### **4.4.3 His Narrative About His Family and Others: "There Was No Exit."**

Lee got married at the age of 31. He lived with his old mother, his wife, one son and two daughters. His children are all married. According to him, his marriage was completely dysfunctional. When his wife became pregnant, she was so weak that she had to be hospitalised. When she was pregnant for about eight months, she began to break down mentally and finally was diagnosed with schizophrenia. At night, she used to go outside and rave. After she gave birth to a baby, she brought the baby to the hospital, although doctors said that the baby was all right. Her schizophrenia was so severe that she once pointed a knife toward her mother-in-law, who therefore suffered a heartburning. As her condition was becoming more severe, his acquaintances urged him to divorce his wife. At that time, schizophrenia was considered insanity. He says, "Because of her schizophrenia, our family relations all collapsed. I took care of my wife, came into conflict with my mother, and failed to take good care of my children."

As she consecutively gave birth to two daughters, her condition became worse. They were living in a town where sons were preferred to daughters under the influence of Confucianism. She even set their house on fire. She was so fretful. He was rebuked by older relatives for living with a crazy woman. Relatives stopped visiting his house. “There was no exit,” he says.

As he considered how his mother had lived, he came to the conclusion that he could not abandon his wife. For the rest of her life, his mother hated her husband, who did not come back. He thought his wife would likewise hate him for the rest of her life. He also thought that as a Christian, he was not supposed to abandon his wife. “At that time, I was as thin as a rake and so stressed,” he says.

He bought many good medicines for his wife and they attended healing rallies. In so doing, he completely depended on God. But he began to blame his wife and his mother in his mind. At last, he found himself exhausted physically, mentally, and emotionally. He felt a suicidal urge. When he was fifty years old, he cursed at one of his colleagues in the midst of a meeting at his work place. Disappointed in himself, he submitted a letter of resignation, but his boss suggested that he take a one-year sick leave. He did so. He visited more than thirteen hospitals because of frequent suicidal urges. But it did not work. “There was no exit,” he says.

R: You were suffering from severe depression.

C3: Yes. I was suffering from severe depression, and so I tried to read the Bible. But I could not read the Bible. Nor could I meet people. I felt as if somebody was backbiting me. I think it happened in mid-August in 2015. I was lying at home on a Sunday. When she found out that I did not go to church, my wife came home and rebuked me so harshly. She had such a foul mouth. She just forced me to go to church. Immediately after I attended the morning worship service, I came to myself. It was an act of God that I was cured.

R: Then how did you know that you had been cured?

C3: The healing occurred instantly. I called my co-workers to see them. They said that

they had not taken the happening seriously. I had gone overboard because of my guilt. It was a kind of delusion. When I was under treatment for suicidal urges, counsellors repeatedly encouraged me to check out the facts. As I checked out the facts, I found out that I was mistaken. I made much of the fact that I cursed my colleague, but my colleagues did not.

R: You visited more than thirteen hospitals. What help did you receive from doctors?

C3: I was once assisted. The psychiatrist said that I was suffering from depression because I did not interpret things properly, and suggested that I check out whether my thinking was based on facts or not. So I went to the personnel department and checked it out. I asked the chief whether they were going to fire me. He said, “No.” Even after that, I suspected that he might be a two-faced person. That was delusion. But after I experienced the grace of God, I checked out the facts with my co-workers and I did not doubt them.

R: Did you find yourself changed after you were healed of your depression?

C3: After I was healed, I was always thankful. I frequently cried. I sang hymns at the top of my voice, because I was so thankful to God for healing my depression.

#### **4.4.3.1 Reflection**

Cultures form specific kinds of narratives. According to the Korean cultural narrative, a man must divorce his wife suffering from schizophrenia. Lee got married at the age of 31, which was very late in his life in those days. As his wife’s condition became worse, he was urged by his acquaintances to abandon his wife. But he decided not to do so, because he recalled the life of his mother after she was separated from her husband. There was no exit, but he took good care of his wife with the conviction that Christians should not divorce.

However, he came to suffer from severe depression and felt a suicidal urge at the age of fifty, after he acted weirdly during a meeting at his workplace. I could feel the power of the cultural narrative while listening to the story of his wrestling with suicide. He did not

get better, though he visited more than thirteen hospitals because of depression. Then, it happened that he experienced a miraculous healing after he attended a Sunday worship service. He came to regard all those negative thoughts he used to have “delusions” and confirmed whether his thoughts were based on the facts or not, in so doing overcoming his depression. Not only did he recover his physical and mental health, but his faith has also advanced a step further.

#### **4.4.4 His Narrative About His Relationship With God: “I Look to God Only.”**

Until his depression became severe, says Lee, he was able to overcome the criticism of those around him and take care of his wife by means of his sense of responsibility and morality and his faith. Lee began to go to church when he was fifteen years old, and he learned Christian doctrines from a pastor.

Lee was influenced by Elder Kim very much. He was an elementary school teacher. He was harassed by other church members but he did not resist at all. No matter how severely he was harassed, he just said, “Let us calm down. God is watching us.” Lee learned the principle of nonresistance from him and tried to edify the church. Thanks to Elder Kim, Lee was able to continue to take care of his wife, despite advice to the contrary.

Lee told me an episode about Elder Kim. When they were building the house of the senior pastor, Elder Kim used to work on the roof all night and went to school to teach. He used to say, “I don’t care whatever they say about me. I look to God only.” As he worked with him to build the church, he worked hard, trying not to care whatever they said about him, with the conviction that God was watching him.

If Elder Kim overcame difficulties by means of his strong faith, Lee himself tried to overcome difficulties by means of his sense of morality. Lee says that there is some difference between moral responsibility and religious responsibility. He realised that without experiencing God’s great grace, no one could maintain his or her religious responsibility to the end. Lee says that it was ultimately through experiencing God’s grace profoundly that he has been changed.

R: Could you tell me in detail what changes happened to you after you experienced God's grace?

C3: First, I came to know the love of my wife. I saw her praying desperately to God for me, while she could not take care of herself. She was risking her life, just as I risked my life for her when she was ill. Second, when I was ill I realised that I could be hurt or comforted by a word or facial expression. I was very much encouraged by a sweet look or a word of hope. When somebody bought me a meal, I was also comforted. When I became ill, some of my close acquaintances just left me. But some continued to be nice to me to the end. Third, I deeply realised that I was a sinner. After all, some of my close friends left me because I became ill. I came to think that humans are not to be trusted or depended on but to be loved. I came to know about humans.

R: How did your depression make you mature?

C3: As I experienced the grace of God and realised who and what humans are, I made up my mind to live in faith. Not that I decided to do so but that I was led by God to do so. At the age of 61, I quit the job and was drawn to China. I never knew that my father got married and settled down in China. Strangely enough, I was attracted to China and learned Chinese. China was in my mind. To begin with, I opened a Chinese class in church. It happened like a miracle. While I was visiting the house of a senior deaconess, I told her that I hoped to meet young people who could speak Chinese well. Then she told me that a Chinese husband and wife leased a room in her house. I asked the Chinese woman if I could go to factories with her in search of Chinese people. Her husband allowed us to do so, and she and I visited factories to gather Chinese people. Then I began to teach them the Bible.

R: Your explanations make me feel that your life has been changed significantly. How would you describe your Christian faith?

C3: I am thankful for the grace of God and His intervention. Surprisingly enough, we could dispatch a couple of Chinese missionaries from that Chinese class to China. They called us two months later. They leased an old house and they were teaching fourteen

people. I went to China immediately. They were holding a Bible class in an old house. Seven out of fourteen were those who had gone to my church in Korea. In two years, we built a two-story church in that area, which was 85 *pyeong* wide. It was the first church that the S. church built abroad.

According to Lee, there are thousands of international workers in Pochun. There are big fish waiting for us. We can yield the same results here with just a tenth of the expenses of the dispatch of missionaries abroad. According to Lee, his church has forty members from the Philippians, fifty from Cambodia, and sixty from China. Recently twenty workers from Nepal began to study the Bible in his church. As a matter of fact, his church dispatched a missionary to Cambodia, but there have been no results for five years. In contrast, they have gathered twenty people from Nepal in just six months. This is the way in which they succeeded in evangelising international workers: “If they are sick, we visit them and pay for their treatment. We help them to go sightseeing on weekends. One of the reasons why we could gather those twenty Nepalese so easily into our church was because we gave nine hundred dollars to each of those who had their houses destroyed by the Nepal earthquake.” They were moved by the financial help. They asked him why they were doing it. He just opened the Bible saying, “Love your neighbours as yourself,” and added that if we become good Christians, we will be able to achieve world peace.

Lee says, “Since we believe that historical consciousness is important, we try to enlighten their historical consciousness while we teach them Korean history. We ask them to awaken their people when they come back to their country. Every church declares that they will embrace the nations and go out to the world. But the nations are coming to our country. Those international workers belong to upper classes in their own countries.” Lee argues that we must change our evangelism strategies.

#### **4.4.4.1 Reflection**

Position analysis is also used for discourses. We can use that method to analyse the way in which co-researchers bring about relational changes after they change their position. This belongs to the narrative approach and lets one know what their subject positions are when co-researchers tell their stories. Lee has chosen a position between Confucian

ethics and rational faith, but he is confronted with its limitations. After he experienced God's grace, by which he was healed, in critical moments when he felt suicidal, he took a position in God's grace.

As I watched him change his position, I was wondering how his story would be constructed. In communicating with Lee, who took his new position in divine grace, I could understand he rewrote his own life in a more fruitful way. He is now giving glory to God by performing both worship and missions, which are a two-fold responsibility of a royal priest. Despite criticism of those around him, he leads the Solmoru sharing movement. He has opened a Chinese class in church and trains Chinese people working in South Korea in the Christian faith, and then sends them to China so that they can plant churches. His mission strategies also target multicultural families living in South Korea.

What is most important in the personal narrative is the question, "What is or can be told in the narrative, and what influences are exerted mutually?" In analysing Lee's position, I could understand how his stories of sharing and mission strategies were unfolding in the city having composite functions of rural and urban communities. Through Lee, I could ascertain that one's perspective plays an important role in making sense of suffering and pain. In my view, the hunger and tact that accompanied Lee's childhood became the basis for his understanding and accepting his neighbours; God's intervention into his life through healing enabled him to perform higher, deeper, and wider ministries. Throughout the interviews with him, I could feel the power of the position of divine grace.

#### **4.4.5 After Reading a Suicide Note (See Appendix 1): "Let Us Overcome Delusion."**

Question 1: What were you thinking about after you read the suicide note?

Answer: I can understand the motive for attempted suicide. If he thought that he was causing trouble to his family, he may well have found no reason to live. In other words, there is no reason why I must exist. If I were him, I would also think of my family members. I can feel his unchanging love for his family.

This old man had a negative view of suicide. But he seems to have killed himself because



he believed that his suicide was inevitable. In my view, he was under a delusion. He was mistaken in thinking that he was nothing but a burden to his family. Somebody had to deter his suicide. As time goes by, he might have changed his mind. It is regrettable.

Question 2: What would you have told the person who left the suicide note?

Answer: Um. I would have told him to check out if it was true that he was just causing troubles to his family. I would have added, “You must live, everything ends with your death, and therefore you must endure to the end. I know you are in a terrible situation. But we don’t know what will happen in future. New opportunities may come to you. You must wait.” I would also add, “Our life does not end in this world. If you finish your life like that, you will have to live a more wretched life in the next world. You must seriously worry about yourself. We did not engender our life. Since we were born to be a person, we must accept our fate.”

Question 3: Did the suicide note help you to reconstruct your self-consciousness and the spiritual meaning of your life?

Answer: Yes, it did. After reading the suicide note, I wondered what I should write in my will. I also thought that I needed to pray to God that he might allow me to die in peace, and to find ways in which I could help those suffering from incurable diseases for a long time.

#### **4.4.5.1 Reflection**

After reading the suicide note, Lee says that he can feel the constant affection of the suicide toward his family, when he said that he decided to kill himself in order not to cause trouble to his family. According to Lee, the old man took a negative view of suicide but nevertheless regarded his suicide as a righteous act. He committed suicide because he considered his suicide inevitable, but he was mistaken in this respect. Lee says that the old man must have been under the same kind of delusion as he was. In other words, it is regrettable that he was under the delusion that his protracted disease was a burden to his family and killed himself without checking out whether it was true or not.

Lee wants to say to the old man who committed suicide that he must check out whether he was indeed causing trouble to his family as he assumed under a delusion, and that he could change his situations by renewing his will to live. As a Christian, he wants to advise the old man that our life does not end in this world, and that we must live to the end, because we were born by the invisible hand.

In my opinion, Lee is always open to what is happening around him and tries to turn it into something meaningful and worthy. The suicide note, therefore, leads him to make up his mind to pray to God in preparation of his death, pay attention to any other people facing a similar situation, and find ways in which to help them practically.

#### **4.4.6 After Reading a Newspaper Account About Family Suicide (See Appendix 3): “There Are Limitations to the Social Safety Net.”**

Summary of the newspaper account: There was an old woman who was working at a restaurant for a living. When she could no longer work because her arm was injured, she committed a suicide with her two daughters; one daughter was ill and the other daughter was financially troubled.

Question 1: What were you thinking about after you read the newspaper account?

Answer: It is the more regrettable because the suicide is due to illness and a financial problem. I think they could get some help if they contacted any welfare agencies. All you have to do is just contact a welfare agency or a NGO (Non-Governmental Organization) and inform them of your difficult situation. Because they do not know about this system, they easily decide to commit suicide rather than live with difficulty.

Question 2: What would you have told the old woman who committed the suicide?

Answer: I would have simply said to her that it was wrong to kill her own daughters. Her children were God's presents to her, so she should have taken good care of their lives under any circumstances.

Question: Did the newspaper account help you to reconstruct your self-identity and your

soul?

Answer: In this case, the woman committed the familial joint suicide because she could no longer work and take care of her family after she had her arm injured. Judging from the fact that she did not forget to pay her rent and bills at the last moments, she must have been a good and faithful person though she was poor. I feel as if I were hearing an old woman in charge of her household screaming in despair. In my opinion, her daughters had to passively follow the decision of their mother, because there was no indication of improvement in their lives and their sustainer decided to commit suicide. I want to raise more funds to help people like them. I think that life is noble and precious. When I climb a mountain, look at flowers in the field, or watch the sun set, I realise that God exists. While I feel the existence of God in the natural world, I also feel his presence in my heart.

Lee does many good works to help old people in church and the local community. And so I thought it necessary to continue the interview with him concerning problems of the elderly.

R: You are helping many poor old people. What do you think are their most urgent needs?

C3: I believe education for old people is desperately needed. I wish we could educate them to prepare for their last years in concrete terms.

R: What kind of education do you think is needed for old people?

C3: I think we should teach them that their sense of inferiority becomes stronger as they grow older. If they happen to see others talk, old people tend to assume that they are talking about them and become angry. Since they become weaker, they become more nervous and talkative. Old people think that they are talking about what is really needed, but their family members think that they are just nagging. In the end, they are treated as outcasts and left alone at home. In one word, old people become lonely because of themselves. They should be aware of this fact.

R: What advice would you give to elderly people?

C3: I think it is important for old people not to be timid but to live in a dignified manner. They have good reason to boast that they belong to the generation that reconstructed our nation. As the head of their family, they did their best, especially in raising their children. I think it is important for them to have pride in this regard. Then, old people should try to find a place in which they can make use of their experiences and talents. After retirement, I was also filled with a sense of futility. But I became happy and energetic again as I started the Solmoru sharing movement after doing some missionary work for China.

R: Finally, in your opinion, what should churches teach old people? As I conduct interviews with old people, I come to realise that some of them don't know about the afterlife though they have gone to church for a long period of time.

C4: Some churches open a school for old people. But that is not very effective in enhancing their faith. Schools for old people in church simply provide programmes for leisure life and give financial assistance to marginalised old people. After all, man-to-man teaching methods are needed for educating old people in the Christian faith. Before teaching old people in the Christian faith, we need to build man-to-man personal relations. It must not be a one-time teaching. It should be an organised teaching programme devoted to one soul. Small groups are useful for transforming the minds of old people. In particular, we need to make systematic use of the academic findings about the psychology of old people. We cannot simply say, "If you believe in Jesus, you will be happy. You will go to heaven." There are limitations to such an approach. Above all things, if one accepts the gospel of the kingdom of God, suicide is no more a problem to him or her.

#### **4.4.6.1 Reflection**

After reading the newspaper account, Lee says that family related suicide becomes a big social issue because the lives of the subaltern do not rise up to the surface. In particular, it is shocking that a family sustainer decides to commit suicide with his or her dependents in desperation when she or he cannot overcome livelihood problems. Instead, he suggests, if they visit public servants in charge of social welfare in a borough office and

ask them for help, they will provide assistance. He says that it is regrettable that one whole family gives up their lives in despair, without knowing this relief process. Lee wishes that he could have told the old mother that the lives of her children were so precious that it was wrong to kill them under any circumstances.

For the purpose of preventing elderly suicide, Lee suggests the following: We should raise funds to help the unseen lower classes; public servants at borough offices should not only promote welfare services to people but also reflect the needs of people in welfare policies; churches need to cooperate with each other to take care of vulnerable elderly people living within each community; and we can organise a network systematically to prevent elderly suicide.

In addition, Lee says that the best way of preventing elderly suicide is for churches to educate them in the Christian faith. Old people hardly accept changes and stick to old traditions, and so the church needs to take care of old people in a close man-to-man manner, and provide a systematic education making use of psychological findings about old people within an academic framework. Korean churches have been running schools for old people, but in most cases they have just provided some programmes for leisure time and financial support, falling short of providing systematic Christian education for old people. Therefore, he asserts, churches should teach old people about the afterlife by means of small groups or man-to-man teaching.

After taking care of old people and providing counselling services for old people for many years, Lee concludes that elderly people should be able to overcome a sense of inferiority, anger, loneliness and, a compensation mentality. They need to retrieve their self-respect, being proud of the fact that they contributed to the reconstruction of our nation. In my view, that is an important suggestion that enables us to fight against a cultural bias against old people. I completely agree with him that old people become lonely on their own. I think the most formidable enemy of old people is loneliness. I find convincing his claim that old people are left to themselves and so feel lonely, because they feel uncomfortable with the behaviour of their children and therefore keep nagging at them. Hence, I agree with him that old people have good reason to be proud of being the head of their household, and that they need to find ways to serve society using their

experiences and talents.

#### **4.4.7 A Comparison of the Life of Lee and *Winter Cactus*, a Novel that Deals with Elderly Suicide**

Lee's life exerts a considerable influence on the local community, as he leads various kinds of social movements such as providing old people with a safety net, changing the city of Pochun into a city of sharing, preaching the gospel to multicultural workers with a view to planting new churches, for example, in China.

The old woman living in room 308, who commits suicide in *Winter Cactus*, is the heroine in the silver hall. She is most popular with her friends. She is good at cooking, speaking, and singing, which moves the hearts of other old people. She provides useful information and talks wittily, thereby making other old people refreshed and pleasant. In order to help her son and daughter-in-law, she takes care of household chores.

The old woman gives no indication whatsoever that she will commit suicide, but she stops eating anything and dies in ten days. She has been rebuked by her son for being deceived by an itinerant drug peddler into buying some false medicine at an expensive price, i.e., seven hundred dollars. It was predicted that she could easily overcome such criticism because she had such an optimistic attitude. But she was so hurt by the words of her son that she decided to die by fasting.

Likewise, Lee had an optimistic attitude, as indicated by his saying, "I felt happier when I went to work than when I left the office," when he was working as a public servant at the town hall to help those in need. But he cursed at one of his colleagues in the midst of a meeting at his work place. Then, he came to suffer from severe depression, even to the point of feeling a suicidal urge, for fear that he might be fired. Both Lee in the real world and the old woman in the novel exert a significant influence on those around them because of their positive and energetic attitude. They rarely feel frustrated and are on good relations with their acquaintances. They play their roles in a faithful way and create a bright and relaxed atmosphere. However, as he was continuously exposed to adverse external stimuli, Lee came to act and speak in an unusual way, burst out his emotions,

and even felt extremely suicidal. By the same token, the old woman living in room 308 made an extreme decision to kill herself, when she was rebuked by her son.

Through Lee, a real person, and the woman living in room 308, a novel character, we can learn that everybody makes a mistake and feels suicidal. We must remember that an energetic person who has a positive self-identity can feel suicidal because of trivial things.

## **4.5 Fourth Co-researcher's Story**

### **4.5.1 Stories of Now and Then**

Han was born in 1943 and is 73 years old by Korean age-reckoning. He is so weak that he cannot move freely. He underwent heart surgery thanks to municipal subsidy and wears a cardiac pacemaker. Before the operation, he used to work part-time and did some sports. He has two serious worries. On the one hand, he worries about the fact that he becomes weaker because he cannot do any sports. On the other hand, he is also worried about the fact that his financial status becomes more insecure and he falls into debt, because he cannot work part-time any more. What is worse, he underwent cataract surgery but it went wrong to such an extent that he has almost lost sight in one eye. As a result, he does not trust any doctors, including those who treated his eye. Therefore, he is peevish and offensive in everything. Seniors Welfare Centre workers think of him as a troublemaker and have difficulty taking care of him.

Han was born in Songlim, Hwanghaedo, North Korea. At the January 4<sup>th</sup> Retreat during the Korean War, his family moved to Kunsan, South Korea, then to Seoul, and finally settled down in Pochun. His father begot fourteen children through his wife, a concubine, and a *gisaeng* (professional female entertainer). His concubine bore one son and two daughters, while his wife gave birth to one daughter and six sons, and the *gisaeng* two daughters and two sons. After his children disputed over the inheritance of their parents, he has not kept in touch with any of his brothers or sisters. He does not even know their phone numbers. He has not contacted his mother for seven years. One of the brothers of his father married a woman who had been a *gisaeng*, and hanged himself when his family

went broke.

Han is short. His life has been seriously affected by that fact. He got married and begat a son, who was run over by a motorcycle and died at the age of four. He blamed his wife for the death of his son, and he often used to get drunk and fought with his wife. As she could no longer have children with him, his wife divorced him two years after the death of her son. He has since been living alone.

#### **4.5.2. Depicting His Identity Narrative: “I Fight TV News.”**

On April 8, 2014, I began to interview him in a counselling room in the Seniors Welfare Centre, after I was introduced to him by elder Lee. He had a neat appearance and bright eyes. Although a social worker had told me that he was aggressive, my impression of him was not bad. But as the interview started, I came to realise that the social worker was right. The first sentence he uttered was, “I fight TV news at home.” He meant that he regretted his previous life. He fought some news on TV as he compared his past life with the stories covered by the news. He says, “I wish I had not done so. I would have been living a different life.” Those regrets made him distressed and depressed. It became worse after he underwent a heart surgery five years ago. He inherited some money from his parents and opened a restaurant in the basement of a building. The business did not flourish and he incurred a great financial loss. Han thought that he was despised because he was short and that he was unblessed and unlucky.

R: I wonder what influence the feeling that you were despised because you were short had on your attitude in life.

C4: When I went to high school, I could stand it. But as I turned twenty, I became aggressive. If somebody despised me, I just fell on him.

R: After you graduated from high school, you did not endure any longer but you resorted to fighting. In what colour would you describe those days?

C4: It's red. I was such a troublemaker that bandages were part of my body and I frequently went to the police station. In my twenties, I drank and fought every day. It was



like blood-red.

R: How long did you live like that?

C4: Almost ten years. Finally I got sick and tired. When I fought, I had to use a weapon since I was short and weak. I am such an unlucky guy. I was exhausted after fighting for ten years. I got sick and irritated. I hated myself as a fighter.

R: You came to take a negative view of fighting. At first, you did not want to be despised, even if you had to fight. After you kept fighting for ten years, were you not despised any longer?

C4: Fighting is painful. Fighting harmed me a lot. People used to avoid me whether I was home or at a bar. My body was injured many times a lot. In a sense, I was more despised than before.

R: You found yourself more despised than before. What was your life like in your thirties?

C4: When I turned thirty, I made up my mind to live a new life and began to help my parents at their store. As I began to live a good life, I got married at the age of 34.

R: Are there any differences between the ways in which you fight now and as you did in your twenties?

C4: In my twenties, I fought drunk against those who despised me. Now I am fighting against my past. I fight against coming back home, because I am so lonely. I have no hopes. I am alone in this world. I don't know the phone numbers of my family. I am a bad guy. I don't know where to go if my lease on a rental house is over. Moreover, I am getting weaker. Sometimes I suffer from fainting to such an extent that I cannot even breathe. I am an unlucky guy.

#### **4.5.2.1 Reflection**

When I first met Han, I thought that he was living a hopeless life in old age. In analysing

his discourse on “fighting TV news,” I thought that he came up with the most appropriate sentence to express his life. I tried to explore the reason why he fought TV news, the results of the fight, and his voices embedded in that fight. In order to overcome his Napoleon complex due to his short stature, Han chose fighting as his narrative position. This position he had taken in his twenties turned out to be another cause of distress in his old age. His relations with his wife, mother, siblings, and acquaintances were all broken, and he had to live a painful life fighting a disease alone. As he mentioned, he ruined his life by drinking and fighting when he was in his twenties. As a result, he was stigmatised by society. There was a time when his life seemed to be recovered. But he collapsed again. He characterises his life as a life of the “unlucky man.” He hates to go back home. At home, he watches TV news, and in so doing he recalls the numerous mistakes he made in the past. He regrets his past life and comes to have a strong sense of shame. During the interviews, I could tell where his aggressive attitude toward the world came from and why he thought that people despised him and tried to do him damage. That is because of the cultural narrative of the master, which despises short people. After listening to his story which has been hidden deep inside of his mind, I hoped that he will be able to find a way to re-illuminate his life.

#### **4.5.3 His Narrative About His Family and Others: “Son, You Must not Die.”**

After spending his twenties in rage, Han decided to live a new life. He quit drinking and fighting, and helped his father with his work. Some people tried to arrange a marriage for him, and he finally got married at the age of thirty four and begot a son. But his son was killed in a motorcycle accident at the age of four years. Soon after that accident, he began to drink again and verbally abused his wife. He cursed her for two years, saying, “You bitch, you killed my son.” In the end, she divorced him, and he has lived alone since then. He says that she was a good woman and he regrets that she could have born another son. His father, who was the only person in his family who loved and cared for him, died in 1988. There was a dispute among the siblings over the inheritance, as a result of which his siblings turned their backs on him. He used his inheritance to open a restaurant in the basement of a building, but he became bankrupt. He lost money, his wife, and his siblings. Throughout the interviews, he called himself an “unlucky man.”

Han's father loved him very much. When his father caught crawfish in the rice paddy early in the morning, he first gave some to Han. It was his father who saved him at the risk of his life from drowning when he was a fifth grader. When he had meningitis and almost died, unconscious for ten days, his father said, "Son, you must not die," and he sent for a well-known doctor of oriental medicine, who cured him. But he was not on good terms with his mother. He called his mother "that woman." In addition to the fact that he was loved by his father, the borough office once helped him to undergo heart surgery.

R: You are still living thanks to the love of your father and the assistance of the borough office. How were you affected by their support?

C4: Um. Maybe I am not an unlucky person but a lucky person. I was saved from death twice. I used to think that I was an unlucky person because I failed in whatever I did. But the truth is that I survived a couple of crises.

R: Do you know any person who is especially kind to you?

C4: Yes, I do. There is a senior deaconess in the church. She is very nice to me and she often calls me. Whenever I go to church, she welcomes me and sets the table for lunch.

R: As I listen to your personal story, I would like to know more about your life. In my view, you are a good-natured person. But somehow you began to act in a hostile manner toward others because you had an inferiority complex with regard to your appearance. But then again you came back to your original nature. Do you take a hostile or friendly view towards the world now?

C4: I am suffering so much. I find it difficult to control my mind. I am suspicious of everybody. It seems to me that doctors don't like me. Everybody seems to despise me. I am fighting the world.

Han thinks that he has several specific reasons to believe that he is despised by other people. According to him, he had sometimes to pay more money for the same product than other people, he lost sight in the right eye after he underwent eye surgery, and he

was even treated like a kid when taking a pee. He shouted, “They are all weird, so weird.” He says that he got more peevish after he underwent heart surgery in May of 2014. “Five years ago, I guess, I was afraid to come back home. It became worse after I underwent surgery.”

R: What happens if you get angry more often? What are we supposed to do if we get angry?

C4: We hate it if our friend gets angry. We think, “Why is this guy mad?” We are supposed to talk rather than get mad.

R: You don’t like anger. How can we avoid getting angry?

C4: Let me see. People hate it when others get mad. Then we should not get mad, so that people may like us.

It has been ten months since I began to interview him. In the meantime, he became weaker. He now walks with more difficulty than when I first met him. But there has been a significant change. During the interview, he receives many phone calls, and he has some friends waiting to see him after the interview. Nowadays he listens to his friends and gives some advice to them. If he meets some friends who blame the world for their financial problems in distress, he comforts them by saying, “If you had not undergone surgery last year, you would be dead by now. Let’s not fear even if we are facing a difficulty. Our nation has a good established welfare policy. Other than that, we can be helped in one way or another.”

R: How do you want to live in the future?

C4: There is no one else than me. After the heart surgery, I lived every day with difficulty. In so doing, I felt suicidal urges. But I couldn’t kill myself because I was not courageous enough. I just gave up. I thought I would live until I died. But I realised that I would have died earlier, if the borough office had not helped me. And so I came to regard my life as an addition and think that I would live happily every day. I felt lonely, so I needed friends. I wanted to share comfort with my friends for the rest of my life.

R: You felt suicidal urges?

C4: When I underwent heart surgery, the surgery itself was painful; but it was more painful because I had few visitors. I felt so terribly lonely. After I left the hospital, I felt so lonely that I went up to the 11<sup>th</sup> floor of the apartment building in order to kill myself. It was also uncomfortable to wear a cardiac pacemaker. I thought I had better die.

R: When was that?

C4: It happened in the end of June. I went up to the 11<sup>th</sup> floor of the apartment building at lunchtime, when there would be no people around. When I was about to commit suicide up there, I thought I would not die if I fell off the 11<sup>th</sup> floor. I went up again. I passed by the 14<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> floor until I got to the rooftop. My legs were shaking. When I was about to commit suicide, I just stopped.

R: Do you feel suicidal urges frequently?

C4: I do often.

R: What did you think about when you were home after your attempted suicide?

C4: I had wanted to fall off the rooftop of the apartment building. But I couldn't because I had no courage to do so. When I came home, I cried and cried. Not only am I indisposed, but I also have mysophobia. It bothers me. I cannot stand any dirt or contamination. Since I am sick, I get irritated when I do the dishes. I have to clean up immediately after I eat. But it is not easy to clean the table. I don't know how to stop this suffering. It's too hard for me. I have no courage to give up everything and commit suicide.

I once said to myself, "When I am sick, I will wash the dishes the next day. I won't get irritated even if my house is somewhat dirty. I can clean up the house when I feel better." Then I felt more comfortable.

#### 4.5.3.1 Reflection

Narratives enable one to understand the important moments of their life and so transform their life (White & Epston, 1990). Han shuttled between the position that he could survive only by attacking weak people and the position that the weak can receive a reward by doing good. Until he graduated from high school, he took a good position that was required by social culture. Then, he took the bad position that required violent resistance, following the master narrative that emphasised the way one looked. He talks about the tension he felt as he abandoned his good position for the bad position by drinking and fighting. Through the interviews, he has come to realise the differences between when he took a good position and when he took a bad position in the ways in which he connected with other people. After considering the influential power of anger, he realised that he became detached from other people primarily because of anger. He has found the meaning of life as he talked about his father who saved his life several times. He has realised that he is not so much an unlucky person as a somewhat lucky person, and thus found the power to overcome suicidal urges and mysophobia. He now accepts his own situation and has a new perspective by which to find the second best way of living his life.

Narratives are like a window which shows internal and external phenomena, and gives information about the analysis of the structures and meanings of stories (Francesca Polletta, 2006). I consider it a significant change that he has placed his mind in a good position and so he experiences remarkable changes in his relationships with his friends and is able to lead a sociable life. This may well be a counter-narrative on his part. In one word, he is living a happy life as he possesses a new perspective focused on caring for other people instead of being despised by other people.

#### **4.5.4 His Narrative About His Relationship With God: “There Is Nothing After Death.”**

I talked to Han about death. He said that he just wished that he would not be ill when he died, since there is nothing after death. He recalled the words of his father, “Be confident. A broken pot may seem useless, but the water that leaks through the holes makes flowers bloom. Do not think that people despise you because you are short. Be confident and you

will be happy.” He adds, “It is sometimes good to be short. I could move easily in a crowded place. I could go to get a soccer ball because I could go through a hole in the fence. I was fast when I worked part-time for the parcel service.” He has just found out that he can do good works though he is short.

Han began to go to church five years ago. Nowadays he goes to church more diligently, because there is a senior deaconess, who is always kind to him. Because of her, he came to count his life dear, and signed an organ donor card, because he wanted to do something meaningful while he was living in this world.

R: What if you die tomorrow?

C4: Humans all die once. I wish to be reconciled to my siblings before I become weaker. If I had behaved more flexibly, I would be in touch with them. My mother is over 90 years old. I haven't seen her for six years. I have blamed her so much. She was supposed to teach her children the right way. But she didn't care about her children at all. On the contrary, she caused trouble in the family by spreading one child's words to another. So I didn't want to call her mother. She was just a woman. But I would like to see her once before I become weaker. Your friends are none other than those who are close to you. I just want to give a glass of water to lonely friends.

#### **4.5.4.1 Reflection**

Han went to church for five years, but he has not come into a personal relationship with God yet. But thanks to a senior deaconess who is kind to him, he not only feels comfortable in the church but he also comes to consider his life precious. In addition, he wanted do something meaningful in this world, and so signed an organ donor card. In my view, he is more concerned with this world rather than the next world.

Narratives enable people to reconstruct their own life stories and form various identities (Vetere & Dowling, 2005). Han reconstructs his life story. He wishes to be reconciled with his mother and siblings. Moreover, he wants to give a cup of water to his neighbours, who are as lonely as him, and converse with them. I learned through the interviews that he has a strong will to put into practice whatever he decides to do. I think he is a shrewd

and strong person. Ten months after I began to interview him, I felt that he has changed a lot. In my view, he feels more comfortable because of his new perspective. I found that he came to have more friends as he tried to live in harmony with those around him. As people grow older, they tend to live within a fixed framework. And yet, he manages to form a new identity after he found his good personality and learns to love his neighbours and become self-content. I see an amazing change in him. He still struggles against his disease, wearing a cardiac pacemaker, and goes to hospital frequently because of his eye. However, he no longer grumbles but is considerate towards other people, by writing a counter-narrative. I talked with him about the afterlife in heaven. And yet, he turned a deaf ear to the gospel.

#### **4.5.5 After Reading a Suicide Note (See Appendix 1): “He Is a Blessed Man.”**

Question 1: What came to your mind after you read the suicide note left by a 67-year-old man?

Answer: “I think he is a blessed man, compared to me,” he says. This person seems to be realistic and well-prepared. On the other hand, he appears to be weak and soft. Feeble-minded people commit suicide. A really strong person overcomes urges.

Question 2: What would you have told the man who left the suicide note?

Answer: If he plans to commit suicide in order not to look ugly, I would urge him to avoid suicide. He says that he is going to commit suicide out of concern for his family and he wants to die in dignity. But I would ask him whether killing oneself is a way of dying in dignity. As people grow old, they become the same people. It is difficult to recover our lost health, but we must move our body as much as possible and continue to live.

##### **4.5.5.1 Reflection**

After reading the suicide note, Han thinks that the person who left the note seems to be very meticulous, but that it is wrong for him to commit suicide because he does not want to cause trouble to his family; the suicide has a blessed family and so is in a better



situation than him. He emphasises that the suicide is not a courageous person but a feeble-minded person. He made a significant remark that a really courageous person does not fall off the rooftop of an apartment building but overcomes such a suicidal urge.

Concerning the statement of the suicide that he commits suicide in order to die solemnly and humanely, Han wants to tell him to consider how suicide can be a solemn and humane death. In so doing, he makes a distinction between death and suicide, and says that to die humanely means to die a natural death. He also emphasizes that people feel a suicidal urge when they are most feeble-minded, and that they should therefore look for diversions.

As I interviewed him while he was suffering, I watched him glean some unique results of his life and reconstructing his own identity for the better step by step. I was assured that he was rewriting his life as he compared the suicide with him and thereby defining the meaning of a solemn and humane death. As I heard him saying that he would do his best to restore lost health, I hoped that he would be able to round off his life in a positive way.

#### **4.5.6 After Reading a Newspaper Account About Familial Joint Suicide (See Appendix 2): “Dementia Weakens a Devoted Son.”**

Question 1: What were you thinking about after you read the newspaper account?

Answer: It reminds me of my grandfather who was suffering from Alzheimer’s. I often see my grandfather naked. He was extremely strong, although his children tried to stop him. He demolished doors and broke windows. Dementia destroys a family. Our family was an extended one. But in this case, one son had to take care of his parents, both of whom were suffering Alzheimer’s. It is regrettable that he said in his suicide note, “I will take care of my parents.” I wish Mr. Park had sent his parents to a sanatorium.

Question 2: After you read the newspaper account, what would you have told Mr. Park?

Answer: Let me see. Honestly, I cannot feel the same pain as he did. All I can do is just encourage and comfort him. I would say to him, “I sympathise with you. I understand

your situation.” I would be able to listen to his words, as well.

Question 3: Let me know whether and to what extent the newspaper account will help you to reconstruct your self-identity and your soul.

Answer: I am glad that unlike Mr. Park, I did not commit suicide. Now I cannot even walk well, let alone run. Nor can I see well. It’s too hard for me. Instead of thinking about my eighty years of age, I will consider my life precious and spend time talking to my friends over coffee and eat lunch with them.

#### **4.5.6.1 Reflection**

After reading the newspaper report about the suicide, Han remembers those days in which his whole family had difficulty taking care of his grandfather who was suffering from dementia. Han also finds it regrettable that Mr. Park made a desperate choice when he thought that his life came to a standstill. Concerning his words, “I will take care of my parents,” Han wished he had sent his parents to a sanatorium. Han says that there would be nothing else he could do for Mr. Park than simply encouraging and comforting him.

From the perspective of one who has felt suicidal urges under difficult situations, Han suggests several ways to prevent suicide. First, we need to ask those who feel a suicidal urge such concrete questions as when, where, and how they going to commit suicide. Second, he highly recommends that we buy Alzheimer’s insurance, because we are living in an age of the nuclear family; in contrast, when his grandparents were suffering from Alzheimer’s, his extended family cooperated and overcame those difficulties. Third, there are many men who do not come to the welfare centre and stay alone at home. He says that they will be able to enjoy leisure with friends at the welfare centre and they will no longer live a lonely life.

I know that Han is still surrounded by many problems. He is becoming weaker. He cannot walk well. Nor can he see well. He will have to move out, because his lease on his rental house will be soon over. And yet, I am happy to see through the interviews that he is overcoming his past suffering and present hardships, and is changing his perspective with the result that he now considers every present moment precious.

#### 4.5.7 A Comparison of the Life of Han and *Music Sound* and *A Stationery Seller*, Novels Dealing with Elderly Suicide

Old people who live alone appear in *Music Sound* and *A Stationery Seller*, novels that deal with elderly suicide. Han is also an old person who lives alone. Han is seventy three years old and has lost his health, family, and money. When he underwent heart surgery, nobody visited him in the hospital. He had the Napoleon complex because of his short stature and got so many troubles. After divorcing his wife, he has been living a lonely life. Since he has always lived an aggressive life, he has no one to welcome him or place to go. Han began to go to church, though perfunctorily, and to live in relationships with other people at the Seniors Welfare Centre. During the interviews, he recalled his father who had loved and supported him, and began to open his mind to the senior deaconess who was kind to him and welcomed him in church. As he gradually builds good relations with his friends at the welfare centre, he feels less and less lonely.

A 73-year-old woman, named Han Soon-Boon, in *Music Sound* is well-off due to her rich son. However, she always waits to see her son on the weekends, as she is living in a small apartment. She has nobody around her. Her life is sustained by her love for her son and those memories of old traumas related to her husband. Because she has no one to talk with, she misses people so much that she visits a department store after receiving a phone call from a kind marketing agent of the department store. But she feels frustrated to find that the kindness that the female agent showed on the phone was not real but a delusion. She commits suicide by jumping off the apartment, presumably because of this loneliness. She would not kill herself if there were anyone to listen to or support her.

Old Mr. Seo in *A Stationery Seller* is a 70-year-old itinerant stationery seller. While wandering all over the country carrying a bundle, he meets with an elderly woman living in Set-Gol village. She was kind enough to cook for him and to make a pair of Korean traditional socks for him. Mr. Seo often asked after her and began to draw a picture of her with all his heart and strength. In so doing, he could forget his loneliness and hardship. However, he found that during the Korean War, Set-Gol village became a wasteland because of massive bombing. Having lost all hope, he wept aloud and finally he took his

own life.

Both Han Soon-Boon and old Mr. Seo, characters in the novels, have a couple of things in common: they are in a similar age group and they commit suicide while missing people to support them in their lonely and painful lives. In comparison, Han, a real person, used to live a lonely and painful life, but he managed to be changed through the interviews and live a healthy life. Had he not received help and support from his friends at the welfare centre and from the senior deaconess, Han may not have found the meaning and joy of his life.

## **5. Thickening the Narratives Through Interdisciplinary Conversations and Finding Transversality**

### **5.1 Introduction**

Postfoundational practical theology chiefly uses the narrative approach. This study also follows that method. The purpose of the postfoundational narrative research is to find meaning from the stories of co-researchers and also to create new meaning through dialogue. My interdisciplinary team contributes greatly to this study in this regard. Though scholars in different disciplines engage in dialogue with each other, speaking, hearing, sharing, and understanding each other, it does not necessarily mean that they will reach an agreement among them. van Huyssteen (2007:19) argues it as followings:

In this multidisciplinary use of the concept of transversality there emerge distinct characteristics or features: the dynamics of consciousness, the interweaving of many voices, and the interplay of social practices are all expressed in a metaphor that points to a sense of transition, a lying across, extending over, intersecting, meeting and conveying without becoming identical.

That is to say, there exists only transversal points with their own characteristics. These transversal points are discussed later.

In this chapter, I will introduce my interdisciplinary team and then present both their feedbacks on the stories of the co-researchers and my reflections on them. The interdisciplinary team will share their feedbacks on the stories of the co-researchers according to Müller's proposal of fourfold questionnaires, and I will reflect on their feedback.

### **5.2 Interdisciplinary Research**

Insofar as we live in a postmodern society, informed by social constructionism, we are understood within our social context, which forms our thoughts and knowledge (Yang, 2015:295, Cheung, 1997:332). When we listen to the stories of other people, we may react to them in a variety of ways. In other words, it is necessary to recognise that we can understand the stories of other people from diverse points of view. van Huyssteen (2006:15, 2001:80) offers an elementary idea on this thought.

Foundationalism and nonfoundationalism are sharply opposing cognitive views. Some think that it is better to integrate these two different epistemological ideas while recognising differences, rather than to emphasise those differences. Scholars suggest the role of postfoundationalism in this regard (van Huyssteen 1999).

According to foundationalism, there are sure, self-evident, and undoubtable experiences, such as empiricists' sensual experiences or rationalists' self-consciousness. On the basis of such basic experiences, foundationalists form a cognitive system inferentially. Because foundationalism heaps up derived experiences upon basic experiences, it takes a form of a reversed-pyramid. According to non-foundationalism, in contrast, there do not exist such basic experiences or pure experiences, but rather all kinds of experiences are interpreted by a cognitive system.

To non-foundationalists, truth does not correspond to a reality but is a synthesis between these interpreted propositions, and the cognitive subject cannot escape from the cognitive system. Insofar as all experiences become relativistic according to the cognitive subject, non-foundationalism engenders an extreme relativism.

Postfoundationalism primarily accepts the position of nonfoundationalism (Shults, 1999:39). The idea is that our experiences are constrained within such frameworks as paradigms, cognitive systems, languages, and traditions. While non-foundationalists tend to advocate an extreme relativism by focusing on such constraints within frameworks, post-foundationalists view such frameworks as a condition of experiences rather than as a constraint of experiences. Postfoundationalism attempts to grasp the meaning of the reality in a more intersubjective way through dialogical conversations with diverse traditions, because it is possible to experience the reality in a multi-dimensionally way

thanks to our diverse traditions.

It is not that we cannot escape from the frameworks of structure as non-foundationalists think, but that we can be more rational as we develop and reconstruct our experiences in a rationally way through intersubjective dialogues with other traditions. In this regard, post-foundationalists attempt to reconstruct their own traditions critically through dialogue with other traditions, on the assumption that a rational dialogue between traditions is possible. Transversal rationality refers to this kind of rationality that is engendered through a critical dialogue between traditions (van Huyssteen, 1999:137-138). A postfoundationalist concept of rationality is enriched and reinforced by the notion of transversal rationality. In other words, postfoundationalism enables one to transcend his or her constrained position to an interdisciplinary work.

Van Huyssteen (2007:1) does not view the epistemology of foundationalism and that of nonfoundationalism as categorically opposing to each other. Rather, he insists on the interdisciplinary discussion or transversal discussion between them. Postfoundational theology enables a rational dialogue even between significantly disparate academic fields or practices. It is never an easy task to fit quite disparate academic fields or practices together. Such a process is complex and multidimensional, and takes transversal procedure. This kind of transversal procedure does not occur within a certain field but within a transversal space between different fields (van Huyssteen, 2006:9). Such an interdisciplinary dialogue makes it possible to overcome the local community's cultural limitations. Müller adopts postfoundationalist theology for his practical theology. He resorts to postfoundationalist theology in order to develop a practical theological narrative process. In so doing, Müller suggests seven movements.

In conclusion, I would like to point out two aspects of postfoundational theology, as suggested by van Huyssteen (1997:4). First, we need to recognise epistemological differences between distinct disciplines or practices. Second, we can overcome such epistemological differences through interdisciplinary dialogue. This study recognises that there are significant epistemological differences between theology and other disciplines. However, we need to overcome those differences through interdisciplinary dialogue. Therefore, we need to make use of interdisciplinary dialogue and transversal

reason or rationality, in order to overcome epistemological limitations.

### **5.3 The interdisciplinary Team**

In chapter 1, I introduced my interdisciplinary team and explained why I selected these four faculty members. In this section, I will give an in-depth explanation of this team.

#### **5.3.1 Introducing the Interdisciplinary Team**

##### **5.3.1.1 Prof. Gilun Hyun**

Prof. Hyun is a novelist. He was born in 1940. He retired from the department of Korean Literature at Hanyang University. Then, he established the Institute for the Culture of Peace as its director. He is now the editor of the magazine, *Essence and Phenomena*, which is being published quarterly.

He was born in Jeju Island and went to Namwon Elementary School, Ohyun Middle School, Jeju High School affiliated with a college of education. He got his bachelor's degree from Jeju University, master's degree from Sungyunkwan University, and doctoral degree in Korean Literature from Hanyang University. When he was young, he began attending church, but he found an assurance of salvation when he became an adult. When he was a child, one of his family members died, and he has been afraid of death, especially at memorial services. He came to believe that with death, everything comes to an end and disappears forever.

He has been able to escape this terrible fear by working hard as a professor at university. He has meditated on the Bible as literature for 15 years and extended his cognitive horizon on reality; as a result, he has solved the problem why everything ends with death. He has recognised the fact that all beings can only be changed in terms of phenomena but the real essence cannot be changed. He now believes that death is a process for entering another world.

However, he also recognises the fact that the process of death causes terrible pain to



human beings, and that there is nothing humans can do about birth and death. He concluded that though death does not mean returning to nothing, it means pain in the sense that one has to end every relationship in the world. Convinced that ageing, loneliness, and suicide are serious problems, he published a novel, *Glass Wall* (Seoul: Literature and Intelligence Co, 2011).

His recent concern lies in the problem of why human beings have to live in severe pain and die in frustration. He also wonders why God does not present a happy season for those who are suffering or have passed through a thorny life journey. Finally, he found the answer to those questions: humans are to undergo and overcome suffering continuously, and as people become older, their suffering becomes greater; however, if they overcome such suffering, they will be rewarded accordingly. He believes that God will provide them with a blissful world. However, human sins are so deadly that humans cannot enter the new world unless their bodies become completely extinct. Thus, we have to suffer the pain of death.

Such reasoning regarding the problem of death and the reality of God's kingdom can be proved by the fact that all things in the world exist through the process of birth and extinction. In spite of that, it is also an undeniable fact that death causes sorrow and pitifulness because it means a complete extinction of all relationships in this world. Therefore, he insists that we all need to overcome the problem of death by looking at death not so much in terms of emotions as in terms of logic or rationality, thereby establishing our faith. The problem of death and suicide is a most important agenda to be dealt with for the construction of a new culture for the elderly. I would like to make a contribution to this project in this regard.

#### **5.3.1.2 Prof. Suhyong Kim**

Suhyong Kim is an associate professor in Ingenium College of Kwangwoon University. She teaches various courses in such fields as movie, arts, and psychoanalysis. Kwangwoon University is a university which foregrounds integrated thinking ability through creativity and imagination in conjunction with scientific technology.

Prof. Kim was born in Seoul in 1972. She graduated from Jongam Elementary School and Sungshin Girls Middle School. After finishing the first year at Changmoon Girls High School, she visited England with her family for one year. During that time, she had an opportunity to attend Cambridge Chesterton Community College. After returning to Korea, she entered Hyewha Girls High School as a junior. She took courses related to science but she soon regretted taking those courses because they did not suit her disposition; hence, she had difficulty studying at college.

In 1992, she majored in biology at Ewha Women's University. When she was a senior, she decided not to become a teacher but to study psychoanalysis. She loved liberal arts better than natural science, and Freud's writings exerted a significant influence on her future career.

She has earned both her master's degree and doctoral degree from the Study Centre for Psychotherapy in Sheffield University in England. Her master's thesis was about an analysis of Terry William's *Brazil*, and her doctoral dissertation was about a comparative analysis of various movie versions of *Hamlet* on the basis of Lacan's Subject Reality and Benjamin's Dialectical Image.

Her major concern lies in the popularisation of psychoanalysis. For this purpose, she has publicised *Psychoanalysis through Watching Movies*, *Freud's Patients: 150 Case Studies That Developed Psychoanalysis*, *My Room of Unconsciousness: 100 Dream Stories Analyzed on the Base of Freud and Jung*, and *Freud's Analysis of Dream: Finding Self Reflected in the Unconscious*. She is now writing on psychoanalysis for common readers. Through this book, she is attempting to help ordinary people to live a better life on their own by utilising the findings of psychoanalysis. She is particularly interested in the problem of life and death, and symptoms that happen on the limen between them. Recently, the death of her aged mother led her to recognise death from an existential point of view.

### **5.3.1.3 Prof. Youngheum Joo**

Youngheum Joo has been a professor for 20 years at the department of Christian

Education of Chongshin University, and he also teaches students at the graduate school of education and the teachers college, consisting of four departments of education. He majored in western educational philosophy, and he is especially interested in the educational theories of Aurelius Augustine and Jean Jacques Rousseau. Professor Youngheum Joo was born in Busan in 1955. He went to Tongsung Elementary School in Busan, Busanseo Middle School, Peniel High School. He earned his BA in mathematics education and MA and Ph.D. in philosophy of education from Korea University.

Youngheum Joo is especially interested in Aurelius Augustine and Jean Jacques Rousseau. He pays attention to the fact that Augustine, church father of the 4<sup>th</sup> century, practically initiated the educational thought of the Middle Ages by accepting and integrating Hellenistic thought of education critically, thereby presenting many implications to modern educational thought. He has investigated how Augustine's core thought of education explains the process by which one's internal cognition leads to the realm of understanding *via* human will.

He also pays attention to the fact that Jacques Rousseau, thinker in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, contributed to the foundation of modern education by criticising and overcoming the education system of the Middle Age. Youngheum Joo has suggested that education must develop psychological principles embedded within the inner world of the learner and make use of them for teaching/learning activities.

He also notices the fact that both Augustine and Rousseau wrote their *Confessions*. With the conviction that the purpose of education is to lead the students to make good use of their God-given life and opportunities, Youngheum Joo has tried to help students to think about the true purpose and direction of life.

Youngheum Joo has been serving for twenty year as a member of various academic societies, including Korean Educational Research Association, Society of Korean Educational Philosophy, and Korean Society for History of Education. Next year he will serve as the president of the Society of Korean Educational Philosophy.

Youngheum Joo's parents are dead. His father passed away at the age of 73 in December

of 1986, and his mother at the age of 98 in February of 2016. When his parents died, he felt an existential sense of loss. He was all the more distressed when his father passed away suddenly, because he was not ready for it. For a long period of time he cared for his mother, who had lost her eyesight, and so he came to ponder on the life of aged people.

#### **5.3.1.4 Prof. Kyungsook Oh**

Kyungsook Oh is an exchange professor at Canada Christian College and School of Graduate Theological Studies. She not only teaches students but she is also involved in counselling ministries. As a pastoral counsellor of the Global Mission Church, her teaching and counselling experiences are concentrated on youth counselling, trauma healing, depression treatment, and Immanuel approach. Currently, she runs her personal counselling office and supports 80 underground church pastors through healing sermons.

Kyungsook Oh was born in 1950. She went to Hakkang Elementary School and Speer Girls' Middle School and High School. She majored in Korean Literature at Chosun University and moved to the U.S. She received her master's degree from Grace Theological Seminary and Ph.D. in Christian Education from Saint Charles University. She acquired her second doctoral degree from Canada Christian College and School of Graduate Theological Studies. Her dissertation topic was "Inner-healing and Personality from a Christian Counseling Perspective." During this time, she also obtained her D.C.P.C. (Diplomate Certified Psychotherapist and Counsellor).

As a Christian counsellor for the last 30 years, she has been psychologically treating, counselling, and teaching students at domestic distinguished graduate schools, Didim Youth Counseling Center, and Peacemaker Counseling Institute. She also conducts seminars on such issues as family therapy, youth counselling, and couple healing. In particular, her healing sermons exert a strong influence on a large number of pastors. She is currently a pastoral counsellor for both Hanshin Church and Global Mission Church and is in charge of counselling church members and neighbours.

She has published the following books:

*Understanding Youth Guidance* (1994)

*Let's Solve Youth Problems This Way* (1996)  
*Youth Dating and Sex Education* (1999)  
*If You Can See the Nature, You Can See the Cure* (2001)  
*Youth Welfare Consultation* (2003)  
*Help Our Growth* (2007)  
*Recovering Intimacy* (2011)  
*Write to Heal* (2016)

### **5.3.2 Reasons for Choosing These Four Team Members**

The purpose of narrative research is to draw a meaning from the story of the co-researcher and to create a new meaning through dialogue. To achieve this object, it is important to select interdisciplinary team members. I have selected interdisciplinary team members in order to investigate reasons why Korean old people attempt to commit suicide with the following criteria in mind.

First, I selected professors who are concerned about the problems of elderly people and have an integrated perspective on this issue. Gilun Hyun is a Christian writer and served as a professor in the department of Korean Literature of Hanyang University. After retirement, Prof. Hyun has concentrated his efforts on writing novels dealing with problems of old people such as death and suicide, and currently serves as the chief editor of *Essence and Phenomena*, which sharply criticises the church for its tendency to become a political power. Prof. Suhyong Kim earned both her master's degree and doctoral degree in psychoanalysis from Sheffield University, and is teaching various courses, including movie, arts, and psychoanalysis. Her research interests include the problem of life and death, and symptoms that occur on the limen between them. As a distinguished scholar and writer, she is trying to popularise psychoanalysis. Prof. Youngheum Joo, doctor of educational philosophy, serves as a professor in the department of Christian education. He is interested in the reinterpretation of educational philosophy from a Christian perspective. His mother lived for 98 years, and was in poor health. Thus, he made the painful decision to send her to a sanatorium. Prof. Kyungsook Oh is a professor of Canada Christian College and School of Graduate Theological Studies. She has two doctoral degrees, one in Christian Education and the other in

psychology. On the basis of her extended experiences in counselling, she has written various books on psychology, trauma, and healing.

Second, I selected professors who have abundant experiences in public speaking and have had contact with believers so that they can understand social phenomena well. Prof. Hyun, an elder of a church, has organised a study group with thirteen retired professors in diverse fields and invites distinguished professors to give a lecture or lead a discussion. He is going to publish the results of those lectures and discussions. He is frequently invited to speak on the topic of “who am I?” at schools and churches. Prof. Kim, one of the best writers in our time, is a public speaker on psychological issues drawn from various genres of movies. She has become more concerned with the problem of old people after her mother died. Prof. Joo, a professor of Christian Education, has been involved in investigating educational philosophers and has had many opportunities to give a speech in churches. Prof. Kyungsook Oh, a reverend, has many experiences in the area of counselling sermons in the Global Mission Church, one of the megachurches in Korea, and now runs a private counselling centre.

#### **5.4 Reflection on the Feedbacks from the Interdisciplinary Team Regarding Müller’s Fourfold Questionnaires**

Question 1: Are there any parts of the story which have drawn your interests or have touched your heart?

Question 2: What thoughts, feelings, or images were elicited while you were reading those parts?

Question 3: What did you think about when you were reading those parts of the stories as related to your life experience, work, routine thinking, and value systems?

Question 4: Are there any new thoughts, new findings, or new meanings which you discovered from the stories in relation to your life?

## **5.4.1 Reflection on the Feedbacks from the Interdisciplinary Team Regarding Question 1**

### **5.4.1.1 Reflection on Prof. Hyun's Feedback**

Question 1: Are there any parts of the stories which have drawn your interest or have touched your heart?

To begin with, Professor Hyun is concerned about the painful life of the alienated. While he was reading the stories of the co-researchers, he realised that not only he, but everybody is vulnerable to pain or suffering throughout life. He has been especially impressed by the fact that even though the harsh living conditions of the co-researchers were not changed, the world began to be changed as they were changed. According to him, such changes on the part of the co-researchers presuppose that they began to live an independent life, which was possible because they had neighbours with whom they could talk.

As Prof. Hyun points out, alienated people need neighbours. But I think that they also need someone who is able to lead them to God. C2 originally had a positive position, but later took a negative position after experiencing a dispute over inheritance. However, C2 came to know God after communicating with the researcher and took a stronger positive position. C3 had an ethical position but later took a religious position after experiencing healing by God from suicidal urges. After shuttling between a good position and a violent position, C4 finally took a positive position with the aid of a deaconess. Moreover, I think that reading plays an important role in the fellowships of old people. For example, reading enabled C1 to replace a negative position with a positive position.

### **5.4.1.2 Reflection on Prof. Kim's Feedback**

Question 1: Are there any parts of the stories which have drawn your interests or have touched your heart?

Prof. Kim reflected on her own profession as a psychoanalyst when she noticed that when oral language is transformed, co-researchers are transformed accordingly. She is

concerned about the way in which C1, who had the negative thought that, “all those whom I love commit suicide,” began to live a positive life. She found that C1 began to think positively after a battle between such negative words as “failure,” “suicide,” “lowliness,” and “tunnel of darkness” and such positive words as “miracle,” “transformation,” and “sign of hope,” which can enhance one’s life. Prof. Kim also paid attention to the moment at which there appeared a positive sign in the life of C4, which had been so negative. C4 found new meaning in his life with a positive view of his life, which could have ended, as he spends time talking with friends over coffee or eating out with them.

In my view, Prof. Kim understands well how language helps to change one’s thought. As a psychoanalyst, she is also good at analysing the process by which one creates a new synopsis of life, which subsumes the past. I agree with Prof. Kim that at the moment when one’s thinking is suddenly transformed, he or she can create an alternative story of life.

#### **5.4.1.3 Reflection on Prof. Joo’s Feedback**

Question 1: Are there any parts of the stories which have drawn your interests or have touched your heart?

Prof. Joo says that he has paid attention to the philosophy of life on the part of the co-researchers. As she came to view her life as a noble one instead of a lowly one, C1 defined suicide is as an egoistic act after reading a newspaper account of suicide, and believes that we must accept and endure everything in life. Prof. Joo says that he can see a dramatic change of C1’s philosophy of life in this regard. He also took notice of a difference between C3’s faith and ethical responsibility. According to him, it is faith that enables one to change her life, insofar as ethics has its own limitations in this regard.

It impresses me that Prof. Joo pays attention to the co-researchers’ philosophy of life. C1 is able to transcend socio-cultural traditions when she regards her life as a noble one, C2 shows altruistic acts when she cares for her children through her maternal affection, and C3 can live a victorious life through his faith. These changes on the part of the co-



researchers were possible because of the researcher's questions that intended to deconstruct power relations.

#### **5.4.1.4 Reflection on Prof. Oh's Feedback**

Question 1: Are there any parts of the stories which have drawn your interests or have touched your heart?

As a psychologist, Prof. Oh took notice of the inner voices of the co-researchers. She was deeply impressed by C1's inner struggles, and special and persistent wriggling. She says, "In her seventies, C1 changes her view of life and tries to live a worthy and beautiful life, partly because she studies counselling, and partly because of her faith and reading. Prof. Oh was also impressed by the fact that Gee, in her nineties, takes an active attitude and reads books and accepts the researcher's suggestions even to the point of changing her deeds. Prof. Oh was also deeply impressed by the fact that though he is weak and has no wife or children, C4 came to have a new view of life and overcame suicidal urges, since he was helped by the government and other people.

In my view, Prof. Oh understands well the transforming power of the co-researchers' life stories. Although old people must live a life in desperation and resentment, they are able not only to overcome past unfortunate events but also reconstruct their life and write a new life story, as soon as they feel warmth and love from other people.

#### **5.4.2 Reflection on the Feedbacks from the Interdisciplinary Team Regarding Question 2**

##### **5.4.2.1 Reflection on Prof. Hyun's Feedback**

Question 2: What thoughts, feelings, or images were elicited while you were reading those parts?

Prof. Hyun compares C1 to wild weeds, C2 to a withered tree, C3 to the prophet Hosea, and C4 to a fighting cock. According to him, all the co-researchers except for C3 view possessions as a decisive criterion for happiness, and so they are obsessed with the belief

that the more they possess, the happier they become. He also says that their conviction that money, honour, power, health, children, etc. are conditions for happiness is a kind of illusion and is based on unfounded expectations about capitalism. It is a tragedy that human relations are broken because of struggles between parents and children caused by money. Family relations may be broken by efforts to overcome bodily defects. Prof. Hyun says that as he read the interview transcripts, he realised again how difficult it is to form normal relationships with other people.

I am deeply impressed when Prof. Hyun compares C3, Lee, to the prophet Hosea. Though Lee's wife did not commit adultery, her schizophrenia is so serious that he was forced by his relatives and acquaintances to divorce her. However, he never abandoned his wife. Those who get easily divorced, need to take seriously Lee's wisdom and willingness to understand and accept his spouse's faults and weaknesses. As Lee has suffered much pain because of his wife, he becomes spiritual and able to understand and care for those suffering and for the poor. In reading his feedback, I am more confident that we are empowered to love other people as we, like Hosea, maintain right relationships with God even under adverse circumstances. "Narrative is a proper means to carry out its role of forming the space of dialogue in which one can discuss pain of life and find a way how to interrelate it with the positive way of life" (Clark and Mishler, 1992).

#### **5.4.2.2 Reflection on Prof. Kim's Feedback**

Question 2: What thoughts, feelings, or images were elicited while you were reading those parts?

Prof. Kim looked behind the stories of the co-researcher. C1 is walking with the researcher, C2 is a very warm person, C3 turns complaint and hatred into positive emotions, and C4 begins a new life under adverse circumstances. Prof. Kim says that she has come to know that one can not only look back on but also reinterpret her own life as she recalls her past life at the end of her life.

I agree with Prof. Kim that narrative gives vitality to life in the middle of a lonely and

painful life. When shared with other people, one's unfortunate life experiences are no more a tragedy but common experiences, which makes elderly life abundant.

#### **5.4.2.3 Reflection on Prof. Joo's Feedback**

Question 2: What thoughts, feelings, or images were elicited while you were reading those parts?

Prof. Joo says that he has had an opportunity to redefine real happiness through the story of C1, see the image of a wise mother in the story of C2, feels ashamed of his life through the life story of C3, and realises that it is important to have a good perspective on one's life through the story of C4. Prof. Joo is especially impressed by the way in which C4 lives a victorious Christian life pursuing both mission and worship, although he could live a pessimistic and gloomy life because of the emotional wounds he stored up in his childhood. Prof. Joo says that C4 has made him look back on his own life.

According to Prof. Joo, even one word can transform not only one's thoughts or emotions but also his or her lifestyle. He is astonished at the fact that when a person's heart is suddenly touched and moved by a single word, which has been too frequently uttered to be taken seriously, it sometimes pierces into one's heart like a fixed nail and then makes him or her begin a new life. As soon as a thing or event happens to form a symbol in one's mind and they express it, they then replace a thing with a thought. In reading Prof. Joo's feedback, I am especially impressed by the fact that he has been moved when C4 says that he wishes to have a decent meal with his family after a long separation.

#### **5.4.2.4 Reflection on Prof. Oh's Feedback**

Question 2: What thoughts, feelings, or images were elicited while you were reading those parts?

According to Prof. Oh's analysis, C1's children become adult children because of her mistaken hopes that they and she should succeed. C2's offensiveness is formed by the various kinds of traumas she experienced, and her unique affection for and attachment to her children are the result of her attempt to overcome anxiety and fear. C4 continues to

act in a self-degrading way because his persistent loneliness and self-shame lead to a distorted perception. In contrast, Prof. Oh is impressed by the way in which C3, despite his physical needs, desire for security, affection, and acknowledgement is not satisfied, manages to overcome those obstacles by means of his faith and lives a good life.

I am impressed by the two-fold character of attachment reflected in Prof. Oh's feedback. While attachment may enable one to live a good life, it may also cause a broken relationship. If one's attachment to something or someone turns into obsession, it causes trouble not only for him or her but also for other people. Therefore, human beings need sound psychological support. If we are not supported at a critical moment, we may not find the energy needed for our life. In my view, the support from one's family or acquaintances is important, but in the case of C3 leads me to believe that religious or spiritual support is most important.

### **5.4.3 Reflection on the Feedbacks from the Interdisciplinary Team Regarding Question 3**

#### **5.4.3.1 Reflection on Prof. Hyun's Feedback**

Question 3: What did you think about when you were reading those parts of the stories relating to your life experience, work, routine thinking, and value systems?

Prof. Hyun says that as he read the interview transcripts of the co-researchers, he recalled his conviction that human beings are weak but faith is strong. As in the case of C1, everyone may face deadly suffering and moments of fear, but those things will someday disappear. When one endures and overcomes those crises, they will find themselves to be more humane. As in the case of C2's son, people tend to regard the results as more important than the process or method in understanding the relationships between parents and children. According to Prof. Hyun, Christians are not different in this regard. He says that he once more realises the importance of one's values as he sees some Christian CEOs of medium-sized enterprises attempt to raise up their companies in an immoral manner in vain and commit suicide.

Prof. Hyun's feedback makes me think about the extent to which the lives of

contemporary people are distorted. Those who live in a post-capitalism period under the influence of its discourse are losing the noble values of human life in search of illusions, which means success in its worldly sense. Money, power, and social recognition are indeed necessary for human relations. However, if they are perceived as a mere means of achieving success, human relations are destroyed.

Therefore, I think that we must have a new perspective on possessions. God allows us to possess something so that we use it for a good purpose. The more we possess, the more we have to work. If we possess less than others, we need not consider ourselves to be less fortunate but try to spend as much as we have. As I see the co-researchers discard their perverted values and make efforts to transform themselves, I come to have hope that their counter-narratives against the ruling cultural narrative of post-capitalism may affect our society in its socio-historical context.

#### **5.4.3.2 Reflection on Prof. Kim's Feedback**

Question 3: What did you think about when you were reading those parts of the stories relating to your life experience, work, routine thinking, and value systems?

Prof. Kim says that she has realised that there is a simple answer to the unceasing question “how can one change the unchangeable past.” She used to think that it is difficult for one to be changed, but she now thinks that one can be changed if they open their mind and try to understand the words and faces of other people. She became convinced of this fact as she saw co-researchers leave their unfortunate conditions for a better life. C1 is being transformed into a new kind of mother. She does not talk to her children about their marriage any longer. Instead, she appreciates and enjoys her present situation. Her complaint has been replaced by her thankfulness that she has much time to spend with her sons. Likewise, C2 is able to overcome her aggressive character when she looks at the beauty of her inner self and strengthens it. C4 is able to drive out the darkness of loneliness when he accepts others into his own lonely space, while no positive energy can be produced in an isolated life.

I am surprised when Prof. Kim states that “narrative healing is already inherent in the co-

researchers” when she expresses the principle that the counselee departs from a dominant narrative and finds his or her preferred narrative in the process of narrative therapy. I fully agree with Prof. Kim that one’s effort to find and strengthen a positive element within herself is the reason why she can understand and forgive a negative element within other people; when a person finds out unique results, they will be able to depart from the unfortunate past at an unexpected moment.

#### **5.4.3.3 Reflection on Prof. Joo’s Feedback**

Question 3: What did you think about when you were reading those parts of the stories relating to your life experience, work, routine thinking, and value systems?

Prof. Joo confesses that he has lived a weary life, because he has been obsessed with winning, while one can win or lose in life. He is challenged by the ways in which the co-researchers began to live a new life as they experienced positive changes.

I agree with Prof. Joo that a positive change can take place when “we,” not “I,” is at the centre of all things. I think that taking down oneself is the beginning of moving toward a new relationship. Therefore, I am convinced that my life is centred on relationships and that the restoration of relationships is the beginning of a new life.

#### **5.4.3.4 Reflection on Prof. Oh’s Feedback**

Question 3: What did you think about when you were reading those parts of the stories relating to your life experience, work, routine thinking, and value systems?

Prof. Oh, who has once attempted suicide, says that one’s relationship with God is the beginning of a genuine transformation. C1 is gradually entering into a new dimension of life by trying to live a more faithful life in her seventies. The wisdom of C2 should have its own limitations, because it is pragmatic wisdom, which is not from faith. C2 will be able to live the kind of life C3 lives, if she is healed of her wounds and looks into herself from a divine perspective.

I agree with Prof. Oh that the cause of trauma lies in one’s spiritual thirst. Still I think

that one needs the help of other people, especially the assistance of a counsellor, for finding God, because genuine restoration is possible when one specifies his or her thoughts through dialogue with others and takes a positive perspective through communication with God. In particular, I agree with Prof. Oh that counsellors did well to advise C3 to check out the facts, while he was feeling suicidal urges.

#### **5.4.4 Reflection on the Feedbacks from the Interdisciplinary Team Regarding Question 4**

##### **5.4.4.1 Reflection on Prof. Hyun's Feedback**

Question 4: Are there any new thoughts, new findings, or new meanings which you discovered from the stories in relation to your life?

Prof. Hyun shared that he was unstable in his faith at a time when he was suffering tremendous hardships

But he now thinks that he is a blessed man compared to C1, who has undergone intolerable suffering. As a result, he believes that he should pray to God in a different way. We are used to praying when we face hardships or when we cannot achieve our goals. We are frustrated when God does not solve our problems instantly. Prof. Hyun says, first of all we must pray to God that He changes us. We can overcome our hardships when we ourselves are changed. But we can be changed only when changed by God. That is the reason why we should repent before we pray. Without repentance, we may end up complaining and feeling sorry for ourselves.

According to Prof. Hyun, a person can be genuinely changed when they find the true value of life, for nobody else can help to overcome our suffering. I also think that a counsellor cannot solve the problem of a counselee. Therefore, I agree with his opinion that change begins with repentance, for humans begin to change with introspection.

##### **5.4.4.2 Reflection on Prof. Kim's Feedback**

Question 4: Are there any new thoughts, new findings, or new meanings which you

discovered from the stories in relation to your life?

Prof. Kim says that as she read the interview transcripts of the co-researchers, she discovered the power of new interpretation and spontaneous transformation, which are not easily accounted for by psychoanalysis. She used to think that the process of transformation is always difficult and time-consuming, but she now realises that transformation can take place unexpectedly and suddenly. She also says that she perceives the power of narrative when she watches the co-researchers, amidst adverse life situations, introspect their own lives and finding new possibilities therein through story-telling.

Prof. Kim also says that as she looks at C4's transformation, she came to the conclusion that life can be transformed through human relations and the formation of a relationship is not difficult. When she looked at C3' life, she became assured that genuine transformation happens when one's relationships transcend his family and embraces his society. I agree with Prof. Kim that new interpretations are powerful and that trauma can be healed through the restoration of relationship.

#### **5.4.4.3 Reflection on Prof. Joo's Feedback.**

Question 4: Are there any new thoughts, new findings, or new meanings which you discovered from the stories in relation to your life?

Prof. Joo says that as he read the interview transcripts, he has again recognised that it is important to live with a broad mind. As in the case of C1, one will be able to cope with difficult situations in a rational and legitimate way when they try to be objective and open-minded. The case of C2 shows that she comes to have good relationships with other people when she tries to live in a relaxed manner and with a broad mind, which reduces tension and conflict. The story of C3 illustrates that bearing the load of the weak is not a burdensome responsibility but a good way of protecting and ripening one's life. According to Prof. Joo, C4's view is revolutionary in that weak people commit suicide while strong people overcome suicidal urges.

I agree with Prof. Joo's opinion that a revolutionary life may come from a reinterpretation



of the life of others. Not only wounds but their healing also comes from relationships. I also agree with his statement that co-researchers can objectify their own bondage of life and achieve self-understanding only when they live a life with an open mind.

#### **5.4.4.4 Reflection on Prof. Oh's Feedback**

Question 4: Are there any new thoughts, new findings, or new meanings which you discovered from the stories in relation to your life?

Prof. Oh says that she came again to realise that we should never commit suicide because it is an act of extreme selfishness and it hurts close acquaintances. She emphasises that because suicide originates not only from extreme selfishness but also from loneliness and shamefulness, somebody should care for a person who feels a suicidal urge and reinterpret life so that they may overcome their distorted perception. I agree with Prof. Oh that we need a counsellor like Jesus, who really understands, accepts, and loves people.

While I am reading Prof. Oh' feedback, I am convinced that an interview does not end with the story of the interviewee but opens a dialogue space in which the reader of that story can negotiate his or her own position. The significant stories of the interviewee may become our stories and experiences as well. When I hear her confession that her heart is warmed when she reads the stories of the co-researchers, I am assured more than ever that personal stories can shed new light on the problem of suicide, which has been treated from a socio-political perspective. Personal stories of life attract our attention, draw us into a newly revealed world, asks us to change the way we think, and make us sympathise with them.

## **5.5 Conclusion**

This chapter tried to obtain new insights for the present study through an interdisciplinary dialogue by interacting with an interdisciplinary team in different disciplines. Prof. Hyun, a writer and scholar in Korean Literature, shows interest in the change of position on the part of the co-researchers. Prof. Kim, a psychologist interested in movies and arts, notices

that the change of language and that of relationship are collinear. Prof. Joo, a philosopher of education and Christian educator, is concerned with the co-researchers' philosophy of life. Prof. Oh, a Christian educator and psychologist, shows her concern with acceptance and sympathy, along with a perverted perception. Surprisingly enough, all four professors point out that the restoration of relationships gives rise to the transformation of life.

As van Huyssteen says (2009: 20), a transversal perspective from different disciplines creates a flexible space for the cognition and rationality of human beings. This kind of academic transversality requires an interdisciplinary conversation as a performance of interrelational, flexible, and transversal human reason or rationality. In listening to various interdisciplinary voices and making use of transversal rationality, I have come to a better understanding of the life of old people who are driven to extreme decisions, including suicide. What is important is not so much how one recognises it as the ways in which a pastoral counsellor can play a role in Korean society.

In this chapter, I was able to gain some insights from a cross-disciplinary dialogue with an interdisciplinary team of scholars. Professor Hyun, who is a novelist and scholar of Korean Literature, is concerned with the painful lives of marginalised people and pays attention to the change of positions on the part of the four co-researchers. The positions of the co-searchers were changed when they interacted with neighbours. Fellowship with neighbours changed the co-researchers and made them think about death and suicide, find new meanings in their lives, and live more abundant lives. Professor Hyun's response led me to summarise the process of interviews as follows: change of positions --> evaluation of one's life and death --> preparation for one's remaining life. I have learned from Professor Hyun that we need to view death from a logical perspective, not merely from an emotional perspective. This view of death has thickened my understanding of death.

Professor Kim, a psychologist interested in movies and arts, notices that the change of language and that of relationship are collinear. While paying attention to the time when the co-researchers changed their negative beliefs, Professor Kim found that their positive beliefs in conflict with negative beliefs came to prevail at a certain point of time. Without

her insightful remarks, I might not have realised that the co-researchers were using both negative and positive keywords in the interviews. Professor Kim's response helped me to interpret the recorded interviews in a new way and realise the need to devise effective questions for the interviews.

Professor Joo, a philosopher of education and Christian educator, is concerned with the co-researchers' philosophy of life and, in particular, with their practical rationality. After reading the interviews, Professor Joo found that the co-researchers gained the ability to recognise what would be good and beneficial to them. In particular, Professor Joo could understand the practical rationality of the co-researchers by reading their evaluation of the suicide notes. Professor Joo's response helped me to realise that suicide notes are more helpful in understanding perspectives on suicide than commonplace questions and answers about suicide.

Professor Oh, a psychological counsellor who has a doctoral degree in education, is interested in cognitive distortion. According to her, suicide is a result of cognitive deconstruction, which is related to mental narrowing. Because of this, a person loses control of himself or herself and comes to commit suicide. Professor Oh's response helped me to realise that we need to educate suffering people about the meaning of life and death, beyond empathy and acceptance, in order to prevent suicide.

The feedback from the interdisciplinary team helped me to a better understanding of the logic of death, how to ask questions, the potential of old people, and the need for education about life and death. Interestingly, all professors paid attention to the importance of the restoration of relationships. I am convinced that any creative method for preventing suicide should be closely related to the restoration of relationships.

According to van Huyssteen (2009:20), crossings between diverse perspectives of different disciplines opens a new space for one's perception and rationality. These interdisciplinary crossings demand human rationality, which is inter-relational, transitional, and transversal, or interdisciplinary conversation as a practice of rationality.

In listening to the diverse voices from different disciplines and developing transversal rationality, I was able to expand my perspective on the lives of the elderly faced with extreme choices. It is not merely about whether I recognise them or not but what kind of role I can play in Korean society as a pastoral counsellor.

## 6. New Narratives of the Elderly

### 6.1 Introduction

This study attempted to gain a deeper understanding of pastoral counselling and pastoral care for elderly people by observing their perspectives on suicide. Pastoral care is essential for those elderly people who are facing inevitable death and dependence, who are living in despair and frustration, and especially who are making up their minds to "end it all" at the end of their lives. I have engaged in a dialogue with four co-researchers, who have felt suicidal urges or whose family has undergone a similar experiences, with a view to understanding their stories of now and then in relation to death or suicide. In so doing, this study has aimed to better understand elderly life and so suggest a way in which we can live an abundant life.

This research employed a narrative approach as its methodology, along with Müller's seven movements method based on postfoundational practical theology. Narrative research is very helpful for dealing with sensitive topics such as suicide. I first looked at Korean short and medium-length novels dealing with elderly suicide; novels are useful texts for the exploration of the perspective of elderly people on suicide, because they both reflect and inflect realities. Because narrative research also helps to understand little-known phenomena, research on personal stories was carried out in order to deal with the issue of suicide, which was treated from a socio-political perspective in the past. The co-researchers were asked questions and communication with them was on a mental and emotional level, connecting to their social and cultural worlds. In so doing, we have been attracted to each other, shared a new world emotionally, and transformed our thoughts.

Finally, I have invited an interdisciplinary team for interdisciplinary conversation. By using the postfoundational practical theology developed by Müller, I have implemented communicative rationality. Postfoundational practical theology achieved through multifaceted and multidimensional communication pursues "unmatched convergence"

and "integration without absorption" (Schrag, 1977:128). The following four professors were asked to take part in this research as the interdisciplinary team: 1) a scholar of Korean Literature, novelist, and editor of *Essence and Phenomenon*, 2) a psychoanalyst, 3) a doctor in Christian education and psychology who is a pastoral counsellor, and 4) a scholar who combines education philosophy with Christian education.

## 6.2 Giving Voice to the Co-researchers' Experiences

Both narrative research and qualitative research are useful in exploring narrative voices that are not heard often. "This practical Theological narrative is not only a paradigm-story, but also a method-story. It is an integrative narrative, which allows the practical theologian to participate in processes of both 'story-telling' and 'story-development,' with integrity. Therefore it is a practical theology that is sensitive, descriptive, but also bold in its deconstruction of negative discourses and in its development of new alternative stories" (Müller, 2005:14).

As Müller points out, the researcher takes part in "story-telling" and "story-development," but these narratives belong to the co-researchers. In listening to the life stories of the co-researchers, the present researcher has attempted to structuralise both dialogue and relationships embedded within those stories, in so doing constructing narratives of their suicidal urges and of related experiences on the part of their family members. The contribution of this study lies in enriching suicide studies, which was largely produced by experts, by appropriating the perspectives of laypeople on the issue. The researcher has tried to understand the identity of elderly people by listening to the life stories of the co-researchers through the voice of the narrator.

While trying to explore unheard narrative voices, the researcher has kept two things in mind. First, by listening to the personal and private experiences of the co-researchers through the voice of the narrator, the researcher has tried to create an alternative story that replaces the cultural master narrative of getting old. This narrative voice makes a contribution to the deconstruction of negative discourses and reconstruction of new discourses adaptable to change. Through these narrative voices, I was able to reconstruct

a basis for a social and political movement. The stories of the co-researchers are not just reminders of past events, but they make the storytellers look like narrators who observe specific events. Through this process, a re-told story becomes an alternative narrative and gives a voice to their experiences. By constructing these alternative stories, we are able to move them from the periphery to the centre of society. However, the co-researchers should not be mistaken in thinking that they are in a special position to create meanings that transcend history and society. The co-researchers should find out their identity in the narrative voices, which are possessed by them and reveal their life experiences, and admit to their possession and authenticity in this sense. Narrative should be thought of as valuable because it creates one's own story and enables one to talk about his/her memories and creative thoughts *via* story-telling. Therefore, a narrative voice is not a simple an entity which can be possessed or given. It is dialogical in the sense that it is negotiated and performed (Mark Davis et al, 2014:281).

Second, it must be kept in mind that the narrative voice can reveal the problems that strengthen the social sense of belonging on the part of the co-researchers. If their voices are not heard because of the highlighted voices of a minority group, they may feel more alienated. If one carries out research on the basis that their lives are socially marginalised, it may make them more powerless than before (Mauthner, 2002). The stories of those who have experienced suicide or abuse can lead to a fixation of their lives.

As seen above, narrative research needs to sensitively react to the social context. However, it is clear that narrative research is significantly helpful in dealing with sensitive subject matters. Narrative research enables people to understand their lives in a deeper and clearer way, and enlightens our lack of knowledge by listening to the voices of laypeople in looking at little-unknown phenomena.

### **6.3 Empowering the Co-researchers' Voices**

It is important that the elderly find their voices within their family or local community. The narrative approach provides a way in which they can find their voices and separate

themselves from the problems, thereby looking at those problems as such. It was necessary to build a relationship with elderly people before doing this. After building a relationship with elderly people, I needed to deconstruct their prejudices in order to reach a new understanding. By deconstructing their prejudices, I was able to view the elderly people not as mere objects of research but as my co-researchers. By asking them questions intended for the deconstruction of their prejudices, I was able to hear the voices embedded within the problems and find solutions to those problems and finally give voice to elderly people. In other words, the co-researchers were helped to become experts in their own lives.

The co-researchers went through the following changes. First, the co-researchers, who had lost their voices in the dominant discourse and become marginalised (Robert Piehl, 199:148), managed to reconstruct their own life stories as the protagonists, while their hostility towards other people and the world decreased and they formed a new relationship with others. As a result, they felt happier in and more responsible for their lives. Second, the co-researchers discovered "the absent but implicit" within their stories (White, 1977:37), and by taking part in the story that God is writing in their lives, they became the protagonists of their stories. Third, as the co-researchers were re-structuring themselves, they were able to experience new relationships and form a new perspective; as a result, they reconstructed their lives by cherishing new hopes for the future and constructing alternative stories.

I am thankful to everyone who took part in this research. This has been a beautiful experience and a wonderful discovery for me, a person entering old age. This study was like a pleasant journey for me in the sense that it enabled me to live an abundant life, while I was feeling fear and loneliness as I was ageing. It gave meaning to elderly life, as a result of which, I was able to confidently preach to a large congregation, including 1,000 elderly, at a Sunday morning worship service. The congregation, especially elderly Christians, were moved by the counter-narrative, through which I suggested they should look at the world in place of the master cultural narrative.

#### **6.4 Sharing the Narratives of the Elderly in the Changing Culture of Korea**



Insofar as a person's narrative threads are broken, they need to be reconnected (Bury, 1982). Above all, I have tried to understand the co-researchers through inter-relational communication with them. I did not ignore the possibility that they could be changed through the interviews. I have attempted to create alternative narratives, along with them, by deconstructing, modifying, and reconstructing their life stories. This process was a new experience for me and enriched my life. To re-write one's life story is to understand one's past, present, and future, as well as one's suffering.

#### **6.4.1 Construction**

By inviting the co-researchers to act as experts in their lives, I tried to form sympathetic relations with them with a view to helping them to construct their lives by expressing their subjective experiences. During the interviews with them, I have discovered a few important things. Most importantly, the elderly co-researchers were under the influence of invisible yet powerful characteristics of Korean culture: Confucian authoritarian patriarchy and the relational culture based on regionalism and kinship. This implies that Korean culture influenced by Confucian authoritarianism controls the worldview of the older generation and gives rise to many family problems in Korean society.

The encounter of the Confucian authoritarianism of the older generation with the individualist culture of the younger generation, caused by the arrival of capitalism, engendered capitalist authoritarianism, which accelerated dehumanisation within Korean society. Since the Confucian authoritarianism judges the value of a person by his/her success, met with capitalism that emphasises materialism and individual interests, Korean society began to be controlled by capitalist authoritarianism that foregrounds the order of social status (Kim Gyeong, 47). This also informed the lives of the co-researchers.

In analysing the stories of the female co-researchers, the researcher tried to explore the way in which the patriarchal macro-narratives of Korean society affected their micro-stories. The idea of the predominance of men over women and the preferred treatment of the eldest son are two major characteristics of Korean patriarchy. The first co-researcher was influenced by the preferred treatment of the eldest son, and the second co-researcher

by both the predominance of men over women and the preferred treatment of the eldest son. The co-researchers accept the patriarchal culture and place their social status within it. In the case of the male co-researchers, capitalist authoritarianism plays an important role.

The researcher further uncovered that the co-researchers look at and degrade themselves from the perspective of the patriarchal culture and the capitalist authoritarianism. When exposed to an authoritarian person or group, these people lose confidence and become nervous. They have a tendency to absolutise and follow the socio-cultural power of Confucian authoritarianism by ignoring or suppressing their subjective experiences, instead of criticising the legitimacy of such authority.

#### **6.4.2 Deconstruction**

The researcher views both Confucian authoritarianism and capitalist authoritarianism as imported from outside, rather than stemming from inside, which Koreans should overcome. The researcher has been focused on the deconstruction of Confucian authoritarianism and capitalist authoritarianism, which informed the cultures of the co-researchers. In order to deconstruct the problematic stories, the researcher explored the relations between macro-narratives and micro-narratives with special reference to their reconstruction in power relations. In analysing the position of the co-researchers, the researcher has paid special attention to the way in which a specific story is used in specific power relations (Hancock, Epston and MacKenzie, 2006:456), and the ways in which stories structuralise power relations and the ways those stories are handled. By analysing their positions, I have found out that when they mechanically follow the Confucian authoritarian culture, co-researchers act aggressively by rejecting, punishing, or guarding against those in the periphery of society. In analysing their positions, I have attempted to create a space for dialogue in which the co-researchers can negotiate their positions. Not only did I unmask what was constraining the co-researchers through the interviews, but at the same time I also made them look at the positive resources leaking out of the problem-oriented dominant narratives so that they might be changed.

#### **6.4.3 Reconstruction**

After deconstructing the problems of the co-researchers *via* dialogue, I have reconstructed alternative narratives. Insofar as reconstruction is made possible in social relations, I have tried not only to connect to supportive communities but also to associate with authoritarian communities. After reconstructing their own narratives, the co-researchers reconstructed their social relations using those new narratives. It is surprising that elderly people, who seem to be the last people to be changed, make use of newly found stories in order to resist within a system and take part in its transformation as well. In particular, the fourth co-researcher who had lived in anger suffering from an inferiority complex and a victim mentality, reconstructed his own self-narrative.

#### **6.4.4 Older People's Perspectives on Suicide**

The researcher has conducted qualitative interviews with the co-researchers in order to find out their perspectives on suicide within the Christian tradition.

- The very thought of committing suicide is an act of betrayal to the parents and God.
- The suicide should be considerate of the pain and wounds of the bereaved.
- People consider suicide when they are facing intolerable suffering. At that time, they must turn their eyes away.
- Those who attempt suicide are under illusions. Therefore, they should distinguish between facts and illusion.
- We should help those who feel suicidal urges by teaching them how to live and so changing their psychological background.
- It is not only those who have serious problems that commit suicide. When despised by their children, ordinary people may feel a suicidal urge.
- We must live until we die a natural death, because we were born by some power.
- Suicide is not an act of courage but an act of weakness.
- We need to think of the difference between suicide and natural death. To die in a humane manner is to die a natural death.
- In order to prevent suicide, the church needs to empower older people to overcome such symptoms as depression.
- If one is considered to have a suicidal urge, we should ask when, where, and how are they going to commit suicide, so that we may prevent their suicide.

#### **6.4.5 God's Intervention into the Narrative**

The narrative of the kingdom of God is important to the co-researchers. The issue of death led the co-researchers to an encounter with Bible stories. The story of death ultimately made the co-researchers focus on the future. The narrative of the kingdom of God enabled the co-researchers to construct new selves, and thereby create perfect stories that connect with the past, the present, and the future. I have come to have hope for elderly people through the interviews. Though elderly people are commonly regarded as obstinate and unchangeable, I have realised that they are ready to be changed insofar as they believe that they can construct their own lives. This finding was made possible because I shared the narratives of the co-researchers.

#### **6.4.6 Inviting the Interdisciplinary Team**

We should not transcend our tradition but develop it rationally by interacting with other traditions. Instead of a universal rationality that transcends or overcomes tradition, we need to develop the rationality of traditions through interaction with them. The rationality that is inter-subjectively developed through this communicative interaction between traditions is conversational or transversal rationality. The theology based on this transversal rationality is postfoundational practical theology. Thus, postfoundational practical theology develops a new tradition inter-subjectively by engaging in communicative interaction with other traditions.

In chapter 5, we heard a variety of voices from the interdisciplinary team. The interdisciplinary team gave feedback on the interview transcripts from their unique perspectives. While reading their feedback, I had the impression that someone was watching me from the outside. It was a new experience. It clarified much unclear information and made me think about the things which I had not thought about before. In so doing, I came to appreciate the strengths of the narrative approach more than before. Thus, the invited interdisciplinary team provided new perspectives, thought, and a better understanding. van Huyssteen (2006:21) puts it as follows, as he refers to Schrag: "Talk about the human subject is now revisioned by resituating the human subject in the space of communicative praxis. Thus the notion of transversal rationality opens up the

possibility of focusing on patterns of discourse and action as they happened in our communicative practice, rather than focusing on only the structure of the self, ego or subject.” As Müller points out, this is part of the greater social constructs that helps to develop a new understanding (Müller, 2005: 83).

The interdisciplinary team, the co-researchers, and I began to build a new relationship. We gave new meanings to the results of the interviews, which also engendered new perspectives, understanding, and questions. The interdisciplinary team helped to understand elderly people in a new way, and suggested a way in which further studies can be pursued. Furthermore, the interdisciplinary research provided a way of reflecting on and criticising my own research. van Huyssteen (2007:421) says,

Transversal reasoning is not about arbitrarily opening ourselves up or closing ourselves off to other viewpoints, but rather what it means to discover an epistemic space that allows for the kind of interdisciplinary critical evaluation that includes a critical self-evaluation and optimal understanding.

The narrative research taken in this study led to the following findings. First, through the narratives about elderly suicide, I could hear the experiences of marginalised old people and understand the semantic structure of their lives. The narrative approach to elderly suicide is new in that there have been few attempts in previous studies in gerontology. The narrative approach to elderly suicide does not only bring to light the hidden and marginalised experiences of elderly people. “It would perhaps be done by saying that the goal is not to uncover a, “real” self, but rather to see how language functions to reveal or obscure parts of itself, in short, to understand how a life gets told.” The researcher worked together with the co-researchers and the interdisciplinary team to analyse discourses about elderly suicide through telling and re-telling within the framework of Korean culture. The researcher found that the co-researchers were liberated from the negative influence of socio-cultural discourses and managed to live their own lives.

Second, the narrative research sheds light on the structure of stories. On the assumption that the voices of elderly people may be unheard, the narrative research aims to

foreground the importance of their lives within socio-cultural contexts. In other words, old people come to reconstruct their identities by redefining themselves and rewriting their stories. Stories play a role in this regard. In analysing the structures of their stories, I could understand the role cultural lenses play in their lives and their interpretation, thereby challenging them to face their own problems. Patriarchal ideology seems to be the dominant ideology among elderly people in Korean society, though there are differences between men and women. Female co-researchers were under the influence of such patriarchal ideas as predominance of men over women, preferring sons to daughters, and primogeniture. Male co-researchers put family before individuals. But it seems that old people are suffering most severely from capitalist authoritarianism. In tandem with the nuclear family and individualism, capitalist authoritarianism undermines the authority of old people. Younger generations do not accept the authority of their parents. Neither do they perform traditional filial duties. Because of these kinds of generation conflicts, old people feel betrayed by their children and frustrated over their lives, and lose hope for the future. After realising the power of Confucian authoritarianism and capitalist authoritarianism during the interviews, the co-researchers managed to create alternative discourses of life. Local churches and Christian communities provided them with atmospheres to support of their alternative discourses.

## **6.5 Explaining the New Story**

This research has shown that elderly suicide in Korea is not a trivial problem but a very serious problem. One of the reasons is because elderly people view themselves negatively on the basis of the socially constructed reality. This reality is reflected in such thoughts as “old parents must live with the oldest son” and “the children should marry before they are too old.” If they do not live with the eldest son or their children are not married at the marriageable age, old people are thought not to have raised their children well. This kind of reality, under which elderly people are living, is the result of both the market economy system which treats people according to their commercial value and Korean authoritarian culture.

Once the researcher and the co-researchers found out during the interviews that the master narrative of market economy was the problem, they were able to be set free from its enslavement. This small change became a seed for the co-researchers and it was a delight to see them break free from the structural and material power in society and their family and create an alternative story that stands against the oppressive social system. It was made possible under the holding environment, in which there are self-objects that help to deconstruct and reconstruct narratives and to create and strengthen a positive portrait of the self. In the case of pastoral care, it is not just freeing the co-researchers from the dominant language that reigns their thoughts and behaviour but also by pulling them into an alternative community and helping them to find a new self-portrait and life goal. The creation of meaning in the new life environment that supports the co-researchers is not just a personal work but a social and cultural work of the community. Gergen says, “We approach the world in a different way. This difference is rooted in our social relationships. It is within these relationships that we construct the world in this way or that. In relationships the world comes to be what it is for us” (2009:3). In a Christian community, the self should be found in the relationships with God. The first and fourth co-researchers found a new self and meaning in the story of God, while resisting the dominant market economy story of Korean society. They confessed that their lives had been lived in the providence of God; they abandoned an authoritarian attitude and began to cherish the small things; they stopped complaining about the side effects of the market economy system and began to be self-content. In the case of the fourth co-researcher, in particular, the Christian community demonstrates the importance of the holding environment that supports an alternative life story. The Christian community treated him in a completely different way from the outside world. Through this research, I have found out that the narrative approach needs to help one not only to change their perception but also to experience a new environment, in order to make them able restructure themselves.

In pastoral care, re-authoring the life of the co-researchers does not simply mean that they re-write their own life story. As in the cases of the first and third co-researcher, it is God who ultimately re-authors the story. Müller states in his postfoundational practical theology that re-authoring one's life is discovering God writing one's life story and participating in it, in so doing he/she becomes a co-author and co-narrator (1999:17). This process includes transcending the limitations of reality to which one is subject,

discovering a new reality in God, and reconstructing oneself within it in accordance to Christian values. By doing so, elderly people will be freed from dominant knowledge and return to the true knowledge of genuine fellowship with God, God's compassion, acceptance, and freedom, and create an alternative community of peace, humility and respect.

## **6.6. Findings of the Study**

The following are the findings of this study. First, in analysing novels that deal with elderly suicide, I found that writers present alternative interpretations of elderly suicide. Insofar as they nicely express the complexity of power relations and the texture of human experiences, novels are a good method of narrative research for revealing the invisible truth to the readers.

Second, I could see the co-researchers restore their identities as they looked at their past lives in a selective way during the interviews. Old people reconstruct their lives when they choose happy moments from the past and connect them with contemporary events. This process is the basis on which they create alternative discourses in relation to their children and church communities.

Third, it is generally admitted that old people tend to adhere to past things rather than try and accept new things and thus are attached to their own patterns. It may be true that old people have a tendency to preserve previous habits, but the co-researchers began to live a new life during the interviews when they realised that they were children of God, created in His image, although they were physically ill and poor. In addition, the researcher has realised that reading is important to old people. As they read books, old people come to introspect their lives.

Fourth, I have come to believe that the church should be a place of pastoral care for old people by listening to their stories. The experiences of old people usually disappear



unheard, because there are no links connecting their psychological and physical pain. Therefore, the church needs to be a place for old people to tell their stories.

Fifth, the rationality of postfoundationalist demands interdisciplinary dialogue between local communities, groups, and traditions. The feedback of the interdisciplinary team in this study is significant in this regard. It has been shown that the same story can be converted into other stories when individual values and interpretations are added from the perspective of each discipline. Korean Literature sheds some light on the issue of death, and psychoanalysis helps to structuralise the contents of the questions from a hermeneutical perspective. Christian counselling foregrounds cognitive distortion and the importance of religion, and Christian philosophy of education highlights practical rationality from a unique perspective.

### **6.7. Limitations of the Study**

This study has the following limitations. First, this study is based on the interviews with the four elderly co-researchers who have attempted suicide or whose family members have attempted suicide. Granted that the goal of the narrative research is not so much to generalise as to deepen the understanding of individual phenomena, it would not be sufficient to do research on perspectives on elderly suicide in Korea on the basis of the interviews with four people.

Second, though the significance of this study lies in foregrounding the issue of elderly suicide, which has been overlooked in academic disciplines, further studies are needed that involve a quantitative research to make up for the weak points of the narrative research and compare the co-researchers for a holistic analysis of their perspectives on suicide.

Third, this study is based on interviews with four senior Christians. In order to better understand the experiences of old people who have attempted suicide in Korean socio-

cultural contexts, this kind of study should be conducted repeatedly and further studies are needed that involve other elderly people who are not Christians.

Fourth, I have realised that suicide is closely related to one's view of death. It would be meaningful to investigate whether and to what extent people have different views of death and suicide according to their age.

Last, this study is based on the interviews with four elderly people. Suicide is closely related to family relationships. In order to better understand the reasons why old people attempt suicide, it is necessary to conduct in-depth interviews with not only those who have attempted suicide but also their family members.

## APPENDIX 1

### Full manuscript of will

(National Police Agency (1995-2005) Crime analysis. National Police Agency, 2010.  
4. 30)

My love, ○○, don't be shocked. Please tell other people, except my family members, that "I got the flu which led to high blood pressure and a heart attack." Don't tell others about how I died. It'll make selling our house difficult, and it's an embarrassment to our neighbours.

1. Contact the St. Paul funeral hall and arrange a quiet funeral. 2. I don't have a religion, and we believe in different religions. I don't like the Buddhist style funeral nor a big ceremony. I would be happy to have a simple Confucian style cremation and rest at a city-run charnel house. Please keep it in mind \* You can find my belongings in the piano.

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My love, ○○, since my birth, I have loved and trusted you the most. I'm glad that I could leave you happy. I'm sorry for all the times my instinct as a man has caused you pain. Please forgive and understand me for the pain. If I had lived longer, I would have shown you my ugly side because of a high blood pressure induced stroke. I wanted to keep my dignity and die as a human being. If there is such a thing as a soul, I will protect you, My wish is to "become manure" for my family to be grown on.

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My dear daughter, ○○, I want you to be an admirable housewife and live a wonderful life. I would like to ask a favour. Please take care of your mother. You have been a wonderful daughter to me. I was happy to be your father.

-----  
My son. I'm worried about you because you are still immature. But you will grow up. Take good care of your wife ○○ and be happy.  
Also think about your mother and take care of her.

-----  
Things I'm worried about.

1. The lease for the store hasn't been renewed. 5 year rent protection comes into effect once the lease is newly contracted. 2. Inspect drain pipes as soon as possible. 3. Make sure the pipes don't get frozen.

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-----  
Don't throw away my belongs right away. Take time in sorting them out

\* Please don't worry about me. Don't think that I went to a bad place. Instead, think that I went to a better place to live. So don't worry about me.

-----  
My brother and sisters in law, we've been very close to one other and relied on each other mentally. I'm sorry for leaving so early. Second sibling, please take care of second sister and help her mentally. I also want to say goodbye to my brother and ○○'s mom and nephews. Be happy and healthy. Hope you have a wonderful life.

## APPENDIX 2

### **An extreme decision due to years of nursing a dementia patient and financial problems (Chosun-ilbo 2014.01.08. A11)**

On the 6th of this month around 9:20am, Lee Teuk's father, Park, and his grandfather (84) and grandmother, Chun (79), was found dead in an apartment in Dongjak-gu Shindaebang-dong. The accident was reported to the police by Park's nephew. The police department of Dongjak reported on the 7th, "the time of their death is estimated to be around 11pm two days ago. The investigation led the findings that Park strangled his parents and then hanged himself." The police reported that the testament left by Park states "I'm taking my parents with me."

According to the police, Lee Teuk's father, Park, has lived alone with his elderly parents after his divorce in 1998. He took care of his parents dearly, but they were diagnosed with dementia a few years ago. Since then, he often spoke to his neighbours of the difficulties of taking care of them. One of the neighbours told in an interview that "the granddad couldn't find his way back home multiple times, and the grandma was always in a wheelchair and went to the hospital often." Chun, mother of Park, was diagnosed with lung cancer last year. A place for her had been reserved at B hospice starting on the 6th. But a day before that decision was made, he decided to commit suicide. It seems as if he couldn't deal with the guilt of not being able to take care of his parents.

## APPENDIX 3

### **Mother and two daughters committed a family suicide**

(Chusun-ilbo : 2014.03.01. A10)

A mother and two daughters ended up committing a family suicide after suffering from financial problems. They left cash for their "last" rent and utility bill payments to their landowner.

On the 27th, Songpa police department reported that a mother, Park(65), the oldest daughter, Kim(35), and second daughter, Kim(32) were found dead on the afternoon of the 26th in the basement level of a house in Songpa-gu Sukchon-dong. When the police arrived at the house, the windows were taped shut, and burned out ignition coal was found. The police reported that the front door was blocked with a bed and they committed suicide by burning the coal.

According to the police, after the death of her husband 12 years ago, Park worked at a diner to support the family. The two daughters could not get a job because they were suffering high blood pressure and diabetes. They relied on credit cards and couldn't pay them back, resulting in credit issues. They were also dealing with a large sum of debt from a failed business of their deceased father.

The family lived in their current house for 9 years, Park paid the monthly rent of 500 thousand won and tried hard to cope without seeking help, the neighbours said. However, Park couldn't carry on with her work when she suffered an arm injury, and couldn't support the family. The police assumed that she chose to end her life with her two daughters under these circumstances.

The family left an envelope with 700 thousand won and wrote on the outside of the envelope "Dear Landlady... We're sorry, here's the last rent and utility bill payments. We are very sorry."

During the police interview the house master, Lim, said that, "only the sounds from the

television could be heard since last week and no sound of people. I thought that was weird. So I reported to the police." A person related to the police department said, "Factoring the day they bought the coal with the state of the scene, the police estimated the time of death to be the afternoon of the 20th." The person also said that "because the other members of the family did not agree to an autopsy, the exact cause of death or their health condition could not be examined, but it seemed that even if they were sick, they couldn't afford to visit the hospital."

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